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Kids still at risk on Canadian farms

But new data show fatalities trending down

Winnipeg, March 10, 2009: A Canadian farm can be a great place to grow up. But in the 16 years between 1990 and 2005, 217 children lost their chance.

New data from the Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program (CAISP) show 217 agricultural fatalities among children and youth aged 14 and under - an average of 13 per year for the period 1990 - 2005. Almost half of them were under five years old and three out of four were boys.

Marcel Hacault is the executive director of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association that oversees CAISP. He says the only positive in this "scary story is that the number of child fatalities dropped" over the study period.

"The numbers show an improving safety situation for our kids on farms," Hacault add, "but surely everyone's goal is zero."

He says the peak year for child fatalities was 1990, with 26 cases. The average number of child fatalities per year was 17 for the first eight years of the surveillance period, dropping down to 10 for the last eight years for the study.

Hacault believes the decline in the average annual number of fatalities may be due, in part, to better child safety practices and more farm safety education for kids. CASA's executive director says many more parents are supervising their pre-schoolers closely and constantly whenever they are outside of the farm home and more often they're within safe, fenced-in play areas.

"And", Hacault adds, "we've seen increasing interest in farm safety education for young people, in particular through Progressive Agriculture Safety Days® that CASA co-ordinates across the country." PAF Safety days will be held in 78 communities this year, almost double the number held in 2008.

He stresses that no pre-schooler should be permitted on the farm or ranch work site, which includes the farm yard and driveway where most bystander runovers occur. According to the CAISP data, machine runovers, drownings and machine rollovers were responsible for 68% all child fatalities.

Hacault also says children of any age should not be taken as extra riders on tractors or other farm machines. The latest CAISP report shows tractors were involved in almost half of all agricultural fatalities among children. In most cases, the child who died was not operating the tractor.

For the complete report *Agricultural Fatalities in Canada 1990-2005*, go to www.casa-acsa.ca.

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CASA-the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association - is Canada's national agricultural safety networking, co-ordinating and training agency dedicated to helping producers recognize and manage risk in the agricultural workplace. It is a non-profit organization funded through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Renewal Chapter.