

**Canadian Model Policy:  
Youth Employment in Agriculture**



**CASA·ACSA**  
**Canadian Agricultural Safety Association**  
**Association canadienne de sécurité agricole**

**Acknowledgments**

This model policy has been adapted by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association for use in Canada with the permission of the co-authors of the forthcoming publication, *Model Policy: Youth Employment in Agriculture*, which will be published in an upcoming edition of the Journal of Agromedicine.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The *Model Policy for Canadian Youth Employment in Agriculture* is a resource for employers of young agricultural workers. The Model Policy is applicable to all Canadian producers who employ young workers on their farm operation. It provides voluntary guidelines based on best practices in training and supervision, job assignments and work hours that employers are encouraged to provide to their young agricultural workers.

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) recognizes that young workers are at risk of being injured or killed on the farm. In order to prevent further injuries or fatalities from occurring CASA has adapted, with permission, this Model Policy for Canadian Youth Employment in Agriculture from a version developed by youth safety advocates and agricultural industry leaders in the United States entitled *Model Policy: Youth Employment in Agriculture*. CASA wishes to thank the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety and the Washington Department of Labor & Industries for their permission to adapt this document for use in Canada.

## **BACKGROUND**

Agricultural operations are hazardous by nature and special protections should be in place to protect young workers from specific jobs, locations and practices. With proper job training, adequate supervision, occupational health and safety education appropriate for the age and developmental level of the learner and consistent enforcement of work rules, farm work can provide safe and valuable introductory work experiences and important income opportunities. In many cases, farm work may provide the only introductory employment opportunities available for adolescents. These early employment experiences are increasingly important in motivating young people to seek a career in the industry and enter post-secondary programs in farming, food processing, food marketing, landscaping, horticulture and other agricultural disciplines. Positive early work experiences, hands-on vocational educational training opportunities and robust educational programs in agriculture and agribusiness are critical to the future of agriculture and continuation of our abundant, diverse, safe and economical food supply.

## **PURPOSE**

The positioning and model policy applies only to hired labour, not immediate family of farm owners and operators. This paper attempts to address traditional agricultural operations only, which encompass predominantly field operations, packing of same-farm produced products, and barn work. For our purposes "young" workers refers to individuals 14 through 17 years old. We acknowledge that nothing magical happens at age 18 years in terms of maturity or risk of occupational injury, and that general occupational safety principles apply regardless of age.

# Model Policy for Canadian Youth Employment in Agriculture<sup>1</sup>

These voluntary guidelines apply to hired adolescent workers between 14 and 17 years of age.

## Training and Supervision

- Youth under age 18 should always work under the direct visual supervision (close proximity) of at least one responsible adult supervisor who is physically present at the worksite/location.
- Training for young hired workers should include clear communication and documentation of the allowed and prohibited work activity in and around the workplace, as well as the rights and responsibilities for them and others in the work environment.
- Training for all supervisors of hired workers under 18 should include instruction about:
  - Existing age-based work rules
  - Physical and cognitive abilities of youth
  - Need for extra supervision and frequent training
  - Basic emergency response practices, both general and specific to the workplace and
  - Harassment prevention, including sexual harassment.

## Job Assignments: General

- All farms that intend to employ youth should implement a formal worksite hazard assessment program, including regularly updated safety checklists, accident prevention programs, and regular review of health and safety procedures to ensure they are current with existing requirements and recommendations.
- All manufacturer directions/manuals and applicable local, provincial and federal laws and regulations must be followed. This includes, but is not limited to, those with age, size, training and certification requirements.
- Job assignments for 14 and 15-year-old youth should occur in non-hazardous work environments only. Work conditions should include specific protections relative to livestock, machinery and crop protection products. Written parental consent must also be obtained. There should be assurances that schooling is not disrupted.
- There should be increased but still limited employment opportunities for 16 and 17-year-old youth with restrictions on performing hazardous work activities. These activities can be expanded for those enrolled in approved technical or vocational programs or other work-based learning programs. (i.e. programs in which instruction in the use of powered equipment and safe work practices around livestock is provided, tested and certified). Written parental consent must also be obtained.
- Those under age 18 should not be the onsite/in-field designated “responsible” party for emergency response (unless specifically trained/certified as an emergency first aid responder).
- Noise exposure is a recognized hazard in farming and as such, youth should be provided with appropriate hearing protection and training in hearing conservation strategies (i.e. walk away, turn it down or wear protection).

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### Job Assignments: Specific

- Mixing, loading or the application of pesticides should not be done by hired workers under age 18.
- Youth under age 18 should not operate moving equipment in close proximity to other workers, operate equipment that others ride, or provide on-the-job transportation to other workers.
- Generally, workers under age 18 should not drive farm machinery on or across public roads or highways, unless they have received documented training and are licensed or certified to operate specific farm vehicles.
- No one under age 18 should operate tractors or other ride-on machinery that is not equipped with roll over protection structure (ROPS) and seat belts, and all workers must use safety equipment at all times.
- Certain types of equipment account for a large percentage of on-farm injuries due to the complexity of operation, speed, power or other reasons. Therefore, strong consideration should be given to age, machine-specific training, and experience requirements for any employee allowed to operate this type of equipment. Examples include large tractors, ATVs, skid-steer loaders, augers/conveyers, elevators, chainsaws and stationary power equipment requiring hand-feeding such as chippers.
- Hired workers under age 18 should not work on, around, or in grain handling facilities or confined spaces including, but not limited to, upright silos, grain bins or manure pits/tanks.
- Work involving prolonged exposure to extreme heat, cold or other adverse outdoor weather conditions such as storms should be limited. Youth should be given more frequent breaks than what is recommended for adults. Opportunities for ample hydration should also be made available. Training regarding symptoms of heat stress and hypothermia, (which is a dangerous drop in body temperature from cold exposure) and prevention strategies should be provided. Additional information for dealing with adverse weather conditions should also be in place. For instance, instructions should be provided to youth to contact their supervisor when weather conditions change, making operating equipment more unpredictable and hazardous.

### Work Hours

- Employment conditions for 14 and 15-year-old youth should include daily work-hour limits, as well as start and stop times that are comparable for this age-group in non-agricultural employment.
- There should be specific start and stop times for 16 and 17-year-olds that may differ during the school year versus the summer, and even between school nights and weekends to assure students have adequate rest and study time.
- Those 16 and 17- year-olds who are not enrolled in school, and who support themselves, may be subject to fewer restrictions with regard to hours of work, although hazardous operations should remain off-limits without student learner or other certified training program participation.
- Overnight shift work in field operations should never be assigned to workers younger than 18 years of age.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Canadian Agriculture Safety Association: [www.casa-acsa.ca](http://www.casa-acsa.ca) or call 1-877-452-2272.
- National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety (USA): [www.cultivatesafety.org](http://www.cultivatesafety.org) or call 1-800-662-6900.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Mary E. Miller, Child Labor/Young Worker Specialist, Washington Department. Labor & Industries: [mary.miller@Lni.wa.gov](mailto:mary.miller@Lni.wa.gov) phone:1-360-902-6041.
- Barbara Lee, Director, National Children's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health: [Lee.barbara@mcrf.mfldclin.edu](mailto:Lee.barbara@mcrf.mfldclin.edu) phone: 1-800-662-6900, Ext. 2.

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## APPENDIX A

### OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES REGARDING YOUNG WORKERS

#### Youth Employment

- Career and job training, and educational programs for youth in agriculture, help integrate occupational health and safety training as part of a comprehensive strategy for jobs skills development.
- It is important to balance training, job assignments and work hours with individual youth abilities based on age, which impact developmental capabilities and other factors that may impact job performance. Protections for all minors under age 18 vary by developmental stage and age group.
- Certain exemptions should exist for student-learners to perform hazardous work otherwise prohibited or restricted. Young workers benefit from specific training which includes educational programs to perform the work activity, job-specific health and safety training, and direct supervision while performing the job(s).
- Efforts to improve supervisor training specific to young workers should use all available technologies to make materials and information more widely available and accessible.
- Further research and education into youth safety and career development is warranted to effectively prepare a well-trained workforce for agriculture careers and opportunities.

#### Youth Development and the Work Environment

- Youth under age 18 are in a stage of rapid growth and development which form the basis of the need for restricted work hours and work activities. Youth are not able to safely work as many hours as adults, and they also need more time for sleep and rest. In addition to work, it is important that youth participate in other age-appropriate activities, including school, family, community and recreation.
- Youth require additional supervision and training due to their lack of experience and developmental issues that contribute to limitations of specific skills and judgment. This is particularly important in settings where hazards are present.
- Employment of hired workers younger than age 14 should not be permitted.
- There are significant discrepancies between work permitted for hired youth in agriculture and non-agricultural operations in child labour regulations. These discrepancies may not be in the best interests of the young workers, nor their perspective employers.
- On family farms, parental rights and responsibilities prevail regarding age-appropriate work assignments for children, but this guidance may be consulted.