

# Improve Your Farm's Safety Standards

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All too often the statement is heard “farming is a dangerous job.” It is easy to slip into believing that “stuff” happens or that risks are part of getting the job done. Injuries with farm machinery have identifiable causes – an injury does not just happen. The losses that result from a human-machine incident can have significant costs to an operation’s financial bottom line – loss of time to get the crop in, loss of machinery due to damage, loss of an employee while the injury heals or the person goes through rehabilitation, and the worst loss of all – loss of life.

There are numerous factors that account for farm-machine related injuries. These include not keeping the machine maintained or operator related factors such as taking shortcuts to save time, lack of experience with the machinery, not being familiar with the operator’s manual, and failure by the individual to follow safety rules.

As OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) increasingly enters the agricultural workplace, it is important for farmers to understand the standards that apply to agricultural operations. Specific to agricultural machine guarding is 29 CFR1928.57 Guarding of farm field equipment, farmstead equipment, and cotton gins ([www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)).

The standard requires that every employee be provided safety instruction at time of hire and at least annually thereafter.

## Items to be covered in training include:

- Keep all guards in place when the machine is in operation.
- Permit no riders on farm field equipment other than persons required for instruction or assistance in machine operation.
- Stop engine, disconnect the power source, and wait for all machine movement to stop before servicing, adjusting, cleaning, or unclogging the equipment, except where the machine must be running to be properly serviced or maintained, in which case the employer shall instruct employees as to all steps and procedures which are necessary to safely service or maintain the equipment.
- Make sure everyone is clear of machinery before starting the engine, engaging power, or operating the machine.
- Lock out electrical power before performing maintenance or service on farmstead equipment.

Even without reading the OSHA standards, the requirements related to safe machine operation should sound familiar. These items are covered in the operator’s manual and as part of the signage or decals posted on various components of the farm machine. Often times these statements are part of written policies but not transferred to safe work practices. Owners and managers have the legal responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace under OSHA’s General Duty Clause 5.a.1. Employees have the responsibility to follow the safety policies set by the owner or employer. Together, owners/managers and employees should review these items and remaining parts of OSHA 1928.57 and set safety standards for the business accordingly.

Although it will take both time and effort to improve workplace practices to ensure the safety of managers and employees, doing so has additional benefits. Not only will it reduce workplace incidents, but it will decrease the need for costly repairs from damaged equipment due to operator error, avoid needless downtime for repairs, and reduce the loss of employee workdays. Setting workplace safety standards high will reduce injuries, reduce expenses, and most importantly, *save lives!*