

Safety

From A1

Noland said. “You typically don’t receive the equipment for free.”

Making the investment

Data collected by the University of Illinois Extension and Agricultural Safety and Health program shows 879 farm fatalities in the state between 1986 and 2016. Of those, 383 were related to tractors overturning on, crushing, pinning or running over a person.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, set requirements in the mid-1970s that employers equip all agricultural tractors manufactured after 1976 with ROPS and seat belts. But OSHA can only inspect and enforce standards on farms that employ 11 or more people, a threshold that excludes most American farms.

By 1986, U.S. tractor manufacturers began adding ROPS on all farm tractors over 20 horsepower sold in the United States, according to the National Ag Safety Database. If such devices were placed on all tractors manufactured since the mid-1960s, more than 80 percent of all machines would have them.

Farmers are always mindful of costs, especially in an industry where profit margins can be razor thin.

But Robert “Chip” Petrea, a specialist with the University of Illinois Extension’s Agricultural Safety and Health program, said it’s not dollars that prevent some from upgrades. He said it’s more likely that farmers are comfortable with and confident in their own equipment.

Sometimes, a farmer just decides the improvements are not needed, he said.

“If it’s a 40-year-old tractor, and they don’t use it much, it might just be ‘I’m not spending \$1,500 on this thing,’” Petrea said. “... Even if they’re in a good place, meaning the farm is financially stable, they may decide not to spend \$1,000 or \$1,500 for that particular ROPS for the old tractor that only gets used a few hours a year.”

The same goes for other areas of the farm that can raise safety concerns, such as a grain bin or with a power take-off shaft. Even if safety upgrades, such as

a harness for the grain bin or a lock-out-tagout to make sure electricity does not flow into the bin while work is being done, would not break the bank, Petrea said farmers, like many others, simply rely on the fact that nothing has gone wrong before as justification for not making upgrades.

“The cost of a lot of the things safety-related are really not that much,” he said.

‘Small price to pay’

Most farmers are well acquainted with safety procedures, especially if they’ve grown up working on a small family farm.

Keith Casteel, a partner at Samuels Miller Schroeder Jackson & Sly law firm in Decatur who does work in agribusiness, said he routinely talks with farmer clients about their properties and safety. As someone who grew up on a farm with a father who preached safety, Casteel said it has always been a topic of interest for him.

“It’s a concern to farmers. They want to be safe. They try to be safe,” he said. “But sometimes ... these accidents do happen, and we as a society need to emphasize the importance of thinking these things through and trying to avoid them.”

While agriculture remains one of the most dangerous industries in the U.S., experts say the risk is increasing with the rise of hobby farms, where cheaper, older tractors are being used by newcomers to agriculture who do not have the training or experience of more traditional farmers.

Frank Gasperini, executive vice president of the National Council of Agricultural Employers, warned in a July article in the Journal of Agromedicine that a “very small, subsistence, part-time, non-traditional and hobby farms will continue to pose significant challenges” to the safety of U.S. agriculture.

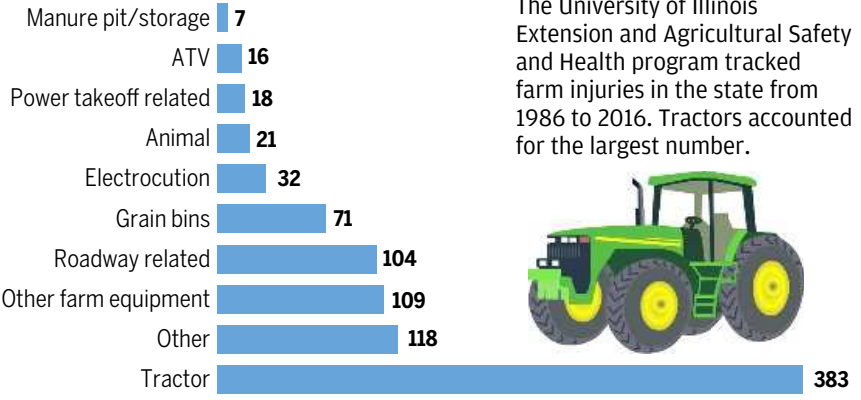
Adam Brown, whose family farms about 1,000 acres near Warrensburg, acknowledged those on “hobby farms” may be less willing to spend the money. But on the front lines in Central Illinois, he said, farmers he knows have embraced the upgrades that have become available. Brown and his family are among those who made the investment.



CLAY JACKSON, HERALD & REVIEW

Employee Ryan Burrows checks out video monitors used for safety on his tractor at Noland Farms in Blue Mound. Grant Noland, treasurer of the family farming operation, said farmers need to think of safety as an investment.

Farm injury by type



The University of Illinois Extension and Agricultural Safety and Health program tracked farm injuries in the state from 1986 to 2016. Tractors accounted for the largest number.



Lee Enterprises graphic

Along with installing brighter LED lights on outdoor equipment, Brown’s farm recently set up a camera system on one of their tractors. It allows passengers in a tractor’s cab to see behind them and lets the driver control the volume of exterior sounds, in case he or she is backing up and needs to listen to a person outside the tractor.

The whole camera system, Brown said, cost about \$150.

“There are a lot of hazards out there, and for us, no cost is too much to protect a life,” he said. “... The things I’ve mentioned are a few hundred dollars, and we’re putting them on things that a lot of times can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. So it’s a small price to pay.”

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