Farm Safety Photo Tips for Media

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The problem is that photos are not just for capturing milestones and memories today. For the full-time homesteader, photos are part of the business of farming. You need photos for blog posts, photos for your Etsy pages or online store front, and photos for articles or press releases in newspapers and magazines. If you write a homestead blog, your audience needs beautiful photos to encourage sharing on social media. Social Media, is driven by high quality photos and you'll get more shares if you can provide them. But you can already feel overwhelmed with the garden, food preservation, taking care of lambs or calves, and cooking from scratch, to spend hours learning to use your digital camera.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Harsh sunlight, animals that steal the shot, grungy backgrounds, the weather, and focal, distractions can make a photo shot fail.

To be sure, taking attractive outdoor photos on the farm is not for the faint of heart.

Harsh sunlight causes people to squint, and flattens out a photograph.

It changes the way colour appears in a picture.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Taking pictures outside in the natural habitat can be challenging.

However, there are some steps to take to ensure one gets optimal results.

Here are some **takeaways:**

1. Always shoot in the shade and avoid harsh sunlight

Pictures taken on the trail, in the woods, hiking into the lake, are soft and attractive. It requires a lot of light manipulations with the use of filters and reflectors to do it well. Instead, find a spot in soft shade or dappled light where your subject can look wide eyed at the camera.

2. Choose morning or evening for outdoor photography

The sun's rays play beautifully with the atmosphere for a few hours after dawn and a few hours before dusk. This is an amazing time to capture landscape photos. It's also the perfect time to take pictures of your livestock or special portraits of your family.

The sun is slanting at an angle and the light is the most attractive for taking pictures of people, too. In fact light at 45 degree angle to the person, is the most flattering light for the human face.

3. Choose an overcast day

The clouds on an overcast day make the perfect lightbox, softening shadows, and mediating color. If it looks like it might rain, bring an umbrella. If it looks like a tornado, pick a different day. You're looking for soft dove grey clouds but not purple darkness.

4. Use the flash-fill feature to light the subject while allowing the background to be lit with ambient light

On digital cameras there are arrow settings that look like lightening bolts – one is for auto flash, one is to turn off the flash, but on some cameras there is a third feature that allows the flash to go off when the lighting is adequate for taking pictures without the flash. Called the "flash-fill," it lights the subject, while allowing ambient light to light the background. This softens the shadows on the subjects face and

adds a beneficial pop of light to the subjects' faces.

5. Look at the background before you click the shutter

Get rid of the clothes line with the unmentionables blowing in the breeze and the dry branch just behind the subject that looks like it's growing out of their head. Clean it up before you click the shutter. Further, add a bit of distance between your subject and the background to allow the background to softly blur. A good rule is to place the subject at least an arm's length away from the background.

6. When taking people-shots focus the camera on the eyes

Our eyes are drawn to the eyes of a portrait, the window of the soul, so make them the focal point of your portraits. Focusing on the eyes softens the other features in the face, and blurs imperfections.

7. Choose your background for light and texture

Look for interesting textures for the background or interesting plays of light and shadows to create Bokeh in the background of your photos. Bokeh is more than just blurring the background of your photo. Bokeh comes from the interplay of shadows and the blue sky or light peeking through. It also makes your subject pop. Play with it in your farm photography.

8. Avoid power-lines, wire fences, and manure piles in the background

While you might notice the clothesline flapping in the breeze, you need to look beyond it to the environment. While an urban photo-shoot might take the abundant power-lines and razor wire as part of the ambience and culture of the photo, farm photos look best without them. Try to avoid them if you can.

9. Take advantage of natural textures like stones, water, and wood in the background

Natural texture is amazing. Take advantage of rock walls, weathered wood, old barns, and water features to bring contrasting

texture and give ambience to your farm photography.

10. Use a faster aperture to photograph livestock and pets or children

While you give up some of the clarity in the photo, the higher speed means you'll be less likely to end up with a blurry unusable photo. Your camera probably has an action setting or a special setting for taking pictures of children or pets. Don't forget to change quality settings when you change subject matter. The aperture automatically changes with the change in the quality settings. With a D-SLR camera you have some manual control over the aperture as well. Get a good user guide like the ones I mention below to help you learn how to use aperture to your best advantage.

KEY POINTS – OVERVIEW

The DOs:

DO show tractors and other farm equipment being maintained and operated safely, including rollover protective systems (ROPS), guards in place, safety chains attached, etc.

DO show children doing supervised age-appropriate chores.

DO show workers wearing proper fitting personal protective equipment appropriate for the task they are performing.

DO be aware of the background and ensure it conveys a safe image.

The DONTS:

DON'T put children in unsafe situations – sometimes "cute" is unsafe. For example, showing a five-year-old child leading a large draft horse may be cute, however it is very unsafe and should never be depicted as a safe, fun or acceptable activity.

DON'T photograph children in agricultural work sites; rather show them in a fenced-in play area where they are being properly supervised. Most farm-related childhood incidents happen when children are playing or doing chores with their parents in a farm

work area.

DON’T allow or show people engaging in unsafe behavior such as extra riders, climbing heights without fall protection, working with unguarded blades or moving parts, and so on.

DON’T allow or show children under 14 driving farm vehicles or machinery.

DON’T allow or show children riding on adults’ laps on tractors/machinery, ATVs or riding mowers.

DON’T allow or show children near large animals unless appropriate barriers are evident.

FINAL WORD

A picture is worth a thousand words only if the taker of the picture knows, understands and is able to incorporate the natural habitat in picture taking.