Recognizing Common Farm Equipment Hazards

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

There are countless machines on a farm, most of which are used daily. If workers are not trained on the correct use of equipment, and if the machines are not labelled with warnings, routinely inspected, and repaired or replaced there are a handful of disasters that could take place, from injury to death.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

Without the proper guards in place, and a solid understanding of the hazards, accidental contact can take place. There are many causes of injury due to improper use of farm equipment. Rotating parts of equipment can pull in clothing or hair and cause entanglement, sheer points can cause dismemberment, thrown objects can cause contusions, lacerations, and eye and head injuries, the list goes on. Get to know your machines, the risks they pose and how to prevent them.

EXAMPLE

A farmer used his tractor to back a log loader trailer down a slight incline. Once he was loaded, the trailer weighed nearly twice as much as the tractor. As the farmer pulled forward, the weight of the trailer pulled the tractor backward. When the operator got out of the cab to investigate, he got caught in the spinning rear wheels of his tractor. The operator was pulled under the tire and out to the back end of the tractor. He died shortly after.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Awareness is key to preventing injuries caused by farm equipment.

Be sure to:

- Develop a knowledge of the hazards by educating yourself on the potential risks of each machine.
- Keep all guards and shields in place and in good working order.
- Adhere to the instructions on the warning signs of every piece of equipment.
- Ensure the power is completely shut down, the key is removed, and all moving parts of the machine have come to a full stop before inspection or repair.
- Never reach into an operating machine.
- When hitching equipment, always inch the tractor forward to position. And ensure anyone assisting you is clear of the area while you are positioning.
- Keep bystanders away from areas where thrown objects may occur.

Understand the different kind of hazards:

- **Pinch points** form when two objects move together and at least one of them is rotating. This could be the point where the belt turns on a pulley, which can easily catch and pull in loose clothing or hair, bringing your body with it.
- **Pull-in accidents** are caused when a person uses a limb, either a hand or foot, to feed material into a machine. The moving components can easily pull operators into the machine in seconds.
- **Wrap-points** are any machine component that rotates. This includes shaft ends, splined, square and hex shaped shafts, couplers, u-joints, keys and other fasteners, exposed beaters and pickup reels. Like pinch and pull-in points, an operator can become entangled when accidental contact occurs.
- Shear/cutting points: **Shear points** form when the edges of two objects move closely together for the purposes of cutting material. **Cutting points** form when a single object moves rapidly enough to cut, such as a sickle blade.
- **Thrown objects** can be caused when machines, such as rotary

mowers and hammer mills, propel material with incredible force, causing lacerations or impaling body parts.

- **Freewheeling parts** are the components of a machine that continue to spin after the power has been shut off. Being unaware of these moving parts can take an operator by surprise, believing he is safe to proceed with the power disengaged. Wait until these parts have come to a complete stop. Some machines with freewheeling parts include cutter heads, hammer mills, baler flywheels, rotary mowers, and blower fans.
- **Crush points** occur when two objects move toward each other with powerful force. Examples include jacked-up equipment, raised hydraulic components and overhead garage doors.

FINAL WORD

Respecting, understanding, and adhering to farm equipment's safe-handling methods will prevent many accidents to you and others. Before handling any piece of farm equipment, be sure you are confident you can operate it safely, check that every guard is in place and be sure the machine is powered down and there are no freewheeling parts before doing any repairs.