

National Farm Safety & Health Week



OPINION

Make farm safety a top priority this harvest season

By RICHARD GUEBERT JR.
Illinois Farm Bureau President

Climbing into the combine seat and hitting the fields each September always fills me with a sense of excitement and anticipation. Even after 48 years, there is no better feeling than looking out over a field of matured corn or soybeans. But, year after year I hear of yet another tragic loss of life due to a preventable work-related injury on the farm during harvest.

The agricultural sector is one of the most dangerous in America with 453 fatalities each year according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' most recent data. Fall harvest, which typically kicks off in mid-September, is one of the busiest and most dangerous seasons of the year for agricultural workers.

For that reason, America has recognized the third week of September as National Farm Safety and Health since 1944. This year I challenge every Illinois farmer to make safety a top priority throughout the months of September and October.

Remember: There is no healthy farm without a healthy farmer heading the operation.

While farming is a highly rewarding occupation, it is a simple fact that there are certain safety measures that must take place to prevent injury or loss of life. A simple checklist can be used when operating heavy machinery to keep yourself and others on the farm safe.

Many farm families work well into the evenings to harvest their crops and transport them to local storage facilities.

Working all hours of the day, often in isolation, takes a toll on one's body. It's just as important to be mindful of your mental state as it is to ensure your physical safety.

Take note of how your body reacts to stress and look out for signs of fatigue such as drowsiness, dizziness, headaches, vision impairments and poor concentration. Finding 5-10 minutes to relax and recharge can provide that mental refresher needed before hitting the fields.

Fall harvest ultimately means more farm equipment on the road. If you've never been in the seat of a combine or a tractor, you may not realize how difficult it is for farmers to see other vehicles while driving between fields. It is important for everyone – farmers and motorists – to stay diligent



Guebert

and keep one another safe during this busy season.

When operating large machinery and other equipment, it is good practice to keep slow moving vehicle (SMV) signs and lights clean. Dirt or debris covering critical safety

features can lower equipment visibility and potentially deposit illegal and dangerous obstacles on the road.

Consider also traveling in farm vehicles during less busy times of day when fewer motorists are on the road. No matter what, however, make sure you are aware and attentive when driving.

Motorists play a role in harvest safety, too. With so many people traveling on rural roads this season, it is up to all of us to drive responsibly.

When driving behind slow-moving vehicles, drivers can stay safe with a few tips:

- When driving behind large equipment, immediately slow down and remain several car lengths behind.

- Before passing remember to look for a clear signal from the person in the cab of the

combine or tractor and pass only when it is safe and legal to do so.

- Be prepared to encounter slow-moving vehicles at all times of the day and night.

Farmers won't be the only ones hitting the roads this fall. Truck drivers also play a critical role in the supply chain, transporting the food, fuel and fiber that each of us depends on.

Harvest is a time for celebration after a lengthy, often challenging growing season. It is my hope that my fellow farmers remain diligent during these long days and nights as we head into another bountiful harvest in Illinois.

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IFB director: Complacency is a farmer's worst enemy

By TAMMIE SLOUP
FarmWeek

Brent Pollard's plentiful hay crop this spring was both a blessing and a curse.

On May 16, the Winnebago County dairy and grain farmer was turning off his chopper box after unloading the last load of silage for the day when his clothes became entangled in a cracked power take-off (PTO) safety shield, throwing him over the shaft and slamming him to the ground.

"I felt it grab and I honestly thought I was dead," he said. "I felt my body to make sure everything was there and in the

right spots."

The Illinois Farm Bureau District 2 director suffered a partially fractured rib and abrasions down his side from his biceps to his thigh. He also developed two baseball-sized hematomas on his thigh from the impact.

While the crack caused Pollard's clothes to catch and wind around at a high rate of speed, Pollard said human errors also led to the accident. He hadn't been sleeping well and woke up tired that morning. As the sun set and air grew chillier, he threw on a loose hooded sweatshirt, which is

what caught on the equipment. His hay crop also yielded much higher than anticipated so the chopping continued much longer than he expected that day.

After finding his bearings after being tossed, Pollard, whose glasses and phone also were broken, stumbled across the yard to his home and asked his wife to bring him to the hospital. By the time the couple was on their way to the hospital, the adrenaline began to wear off and Pollard remembers feeling the full pain of his injuries.

The accident left him shaken and battered, but as his

wounds healed, he began sharing his story.

"After we (farmers) have done an activity so many times, we do get complacent on how dangerous it is," he said. "Something I found after I started telling my story to more people was that other people who have been affected by (farm accidents), especially PTO accidents, have started to talk about things that have happened in their lives to family members or other people in an environment where they feel comfortable, and there can be some healing.

"It does leave internal and

mental scars where the fear and trauma of what could have happened has a dramatic effect."

Weeks after the accident and when Pollard was healed enough for some light farm work, he remembers his stomach dropped and feeling "shivers down his spine" as he worked with the same wagon involved in his injuries. But the work can't stop, he said.

Aside from the takeaway that tomorrow is never promised, Pollard said complacency can be a farmer's worst enemy. A task done 1,000 times can still have life-altering out-

comes, he added.

"I probably operated that lever off the chopper box 80 to 100 times that day," he said. "We have a very dangerous occupation and it's good to tell these stories, just so that we have reminders that things can be dangerous on the farm, and how important it is that we take safety precautions seriously."

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Illinois' House ag members share prospects on farm bill passage

By TIMOTHY EGGERT
FarmWeek

Illinois farmers can expect to finish fall harvest before Congress completes work on the 2023 farm bill.

That was a central message about the \$1 trillion legislation delivered by four of the five U.S. House members from Illinois who serve on the ag committee during listening sessions, panel discussions and interviews at the Farm Progress Show in Decatur.

Their shared outlook comes a month before programs in the current bill begin to expire Sept. 30 and as lawmakers returned to Washington, D.C., Sept. 12 after their August recess. Policymakers will also need to address the 11 annual agency appropriations bills they failed to advance this summer or risk a government shutdown.

"Congress has a little bit of time. They can work some of this out," said Jonathan Coppess, University of Illinois associate professor and director of the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program. "But it also creates a lot of uncertainty, and nobody likes to manage around uncertainty. Believe it or not, not even Congress."

While U.S. Reps. Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro; Nikki Budzinski, D-Springfield; Mary Miller, R-Oakland; and Eric Sorensen, D-Moline; all said they hadn't yet seen legislative text and largely agreed the farm bill will likely not be done be-

fore the deadline, they differed on the specific timeline over the next few weeks.

Bost offered the most optimistic view, telling FarmWeek in an interview he thinks "we'll get it through the House the last day of September" and that "if the Senate isn't being able to get their job done in time," lawmakers will pass an extension.

He said House Ag Committee chair Glenn "GT" Thompson, R-Pennsylvania, and his staff spent two days recently "writing the actual language" of the House-version of the bill. That insight came directly from Thompson when he and Bost co-hosted a listening session at a farm in Effingham County and toured other operations in south-central and southern Illinois.

Thompson told reporters after the Aug. 23 listening session that although some programs do last through the end of the year, "there'll probably be a need for some type of an extension going forward."

Miller, speaking at a listening session co-hosted with five state lawmakers who represent agricultural districts, said "the timing is going to be very important."

She noted the Senate could introduce legislation soon and that the House's September schedule has already been shortened, "so that's not good in light of timing, but we've got to work through those things."

Sorensen said "there's an

optimism that we'll get it out of the House" before the end of September, but it's unclear if the Senate could advance its legislation.

"There's a lot of moving parts, but also an understanding that if we hold it over, the cuts won't be there," said Sorensen, theorizing that missing the deadline could give policymakers more time to negotiate or at least have a fuller picture of agency spending levels for the next fiscal year.

Budzinski explained to FarmWeek that Thompson "is very reassuring that we're going to get to the business at hand, which is actually getting into committee when we get back in mid-September, seeing actual language, text for the farm bill in committee."

She spent time with Bost, Miller and Sorensen at the trade show touring the ag equipment and speaking together on a panel. Asked to characterize any discussions the members had between themselves, Budzinski said there was "unanimous support around the priorities we shared and the fact that this needs to get done for our family farmers."

Impacts of missed deadline; concerns around ag appropriations

If Congress does go past the Sept. 30 deadline, "nothing

just automatically slams shut or shuts off immediately," Coppess said.

"The crop insurance program continues, it's permanently authorized, conservation programs are continuous through 2031 and the (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) basically continues and operates," the former staffer to U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Michigan, said.

Enrollment in Title I ag safety net programs tied to the current 2023 crop year also wouldn't be impacted by a missed deadline or extension because they run on a crop-year basis. But "the big issue doesn't really hit until the next crop year," Coppess added, alluding to the March program enrollment timeframe.

As for his prospects on moving the bill out of the House, Coppess said that chamber "gives us a lot of things to be concerned about" because "we've seen them struggle to do some pretty standard things like appropriations bills, things that we think are bipartisan or relatively non-partisan."

The farm bill won't pass through either chamber of Congress without a coalition, he said.

"If members don't sort of see the big coalitional value to cross party lines, cross urban rural, those sorts of issues; If we can't get over that, then the path gets very narrow and very rocky and very steep very

quickly," Coppess said.

Some of those dynamics were alluded to by the four House Ag members from Illinois, with Sorensen cautioning against "poison" in the farm bill and the appropriations bills.

"We've got to make sure, as (Thompson) has mentioned before, that we don't have a few second cousins that are sitting at this family table that are going to take it over, take the conversation away," Sorensen said. "And we can't allow this to get to the House floor."

Bost said the legislation's make-or-break status will, like previous farm bills, again depend on revisions to SNAP and the marriage of the nutrition and commodity titles.

"Our left is definitely not wanting (cuts to SNAP) at all and our right wants more," Bost said. "It is a tricky balance, but remember, even though that's the biggest part of the farm bill, the most important part of the farm bill to a majority of my constituents is that safety net."

Miller referenced the same issue, telling the farmers and ag stakeholders gathered for her event that "I am not for dividing the farm bill into SNAP and ag production, I'm not."

"But," Miller continued, "we're on the verge of not being able to call it 'the farm bill' (because) 85% of the farm bill money is going to SNAP payments, and food production,

the producers, are being left out and we need to fight back and speak up about that."

Miller, a member of the House Freedom Caucus, has advocated for steep cuts to nutrition program spending and supported reforms to SNAP work and age requirements. Some of those revisions were included in a compromise over the debt ceiling reached earlier this year, and more cuts were included in the GOP's appropriations bill for USDA.

Budzinski, referring to the bill formulated by House Republicans, said "family farmers deserve better than that" and she would vote against it.

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack called out the proposed spending bill during a meeting of Budzinski's agriculture advisory council at the show, framing it as "not acceptable" because "it's calling for about an \$8 billion cut in a \$24 billion budget."

"Frankly, it's kind of a punitive budget," Vilsack said, later adding "the Senate budget is a much more realistic budget. But it too, because of the debt ceiling agreement, is basically a status quo budget."

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