

Putting Farm Safety for Kids First

New local efforts focus on families

by Lorraine Stuart Merrill

Farmer and Call Firefighter Robyn Crowningshield of Ashfield, Mass., got her local fire department to start the first New England chapter of Farm Safety 4 Just Kids. As fire safety educator for their local school, this mother of two is including farm safety training in the state's SAFE (Student Awareness of Fire Education) program.

Crowningshield says the SAFE program proves safety education and changing behaviors works. Lives and families have been saved by educated schoolchildren. A young boy in her district was credited with saving family members from a house fire.

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Crowningshield saw a need in their western Massachusetts community to teach farm safety to children, and did something about it. Ashfield Fire Chief Doug Field and his officers backed her idea of starting an FS4JK chapter. Crowningshield will present a workshop on farm safety education at a statewide SAFE educators training conference, and hopes that others will form FS4JK chapters.

"It's really fun, and I think it's pretty educational—a good combination," says 13-year-old Sarah Townsley of the school safety program. Townsley, who lives on a 40-cow dairy farm in Ashfield with her parents, Roland and Robin Townsley, and two

younger sisters, took first place in last year's SAFE poster contest for Franklin County. She enjoys feeding the cows and washing the milking parlor, and has found the farm safety training helpful. She looks out for her sisters and has found herself "knowing what I should do" in various situations. "It's a great feeling!" she says.

Not just for farm kids

It's not just traditional farming families who need education, Crowningshield says. Her rural community, known for dairy farms, forestry and apple orchards, has attracted urban escapees looking to start small farms and enjoy country



Childhood Agricultural Safety Network

living. She says children of many of these newcomers ride on or operate tractors and lawn mowers—some of them very young. "A lot of people starting up these little hobby farms don't realize the hazards for children around equipment, animals or everything else around a farm."

Crowningshield and her husband, Dennis, live with sons Tim, 14, and Daniel, 8, on a 120-acre farm that was in Dennis's family. The boys raise heritage sheep and chickens. Dennis, also a call firefighter, has a factory job, which provides their health insurance. His third job is farming. He operates a portable sawmill on their mostly-

wooded property. Crowningshield has her own florist business, growing some of her flowers on the farm. Fancy, natural Christmas wreaths are one of her specialties. She, too, has a third job, driving a school bus. "We know the farm safety stuff and make it part of our farm planning and priority setting," she notes. "We still don't allow our kids on the tractor."

The Ashfield Fire Department has participated in the Cornell Farm Medic Course, and is now seeking funding and organizing to repeat the course in collaboration with neighboring towns. "Very few firefighters

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have any farm or animal experience," says Crowningshield, who would also like the firefighters to have animal rescue training.

The department used a safety education grant to start its FS4JK chapter. FS4JK was started by Marilyn Adams, an Iowa farm mom whose 11-year-old son was killed while unloading a grain wagon. The organization's mission is "to promote a safe farm environment to prevent health hazards, injuries and fatalities to children and youth."

Any interested individuals or organization can start a local chapter. The \$250 start-up fee includes FS4JK's barn box full of resource materials. After the first year, annual dues are \$200. Benefits include the FS4JK bimonthly newsletter, the monthly chapter newsletter and free resources. Corporate sponsors offer occasional grants to chapters, and FS4JK holds an annual conference for chapter leaders. FS4JK has 133 chapters—123 in the United States and 10 in Canada.

Crowningshield incorporates FS4JK materials and activities in her school presentations, and provides educational booths at local fairs. "On the whole we may not be a farming community, but I can use a lot of the stuff in the FS4JK barn box with all the kids." She says that most kids are around lawn mowers, snow machines and ATVs, and the gas and oil that go with them. All the children benefit from units on sun protection, hypothermia and frostbite, food safety, electrical hazards and safe play areas.

Crowningshield polls students and has found that many have ties to a farm or to animals, or use or are around tractors, lawn mowers or

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In October 2006, Michael Peterson, country music singer, serves as spokesperson for the "Keep Kids Away from Tractors" campaign.

ATVs. In addition to visiting classes several times a year, she organizes a school safety field day each year, where students visit a series of stations with different learning activities.

Award-winning program

It was just such a safety day for schoolchildren that led Mexico, N.Y., dairy farmer Nancy Weber and the Oswego County Farm Bureau to start an FS4JK chapter a year ago. The fifth annual countywide Farm & Home Safety Day was held June 13 at Oswego County Fairgrounds. This event is offered to fifth grade classes in all schools in the county, but the 600 to 700-student limit fills up fast.

Weber's FS4JK chapter includes a core team of half a dozen "safety crazy people." This group coordinates a much larger group of 100 volunteers who put on the safety day, including Farm Bureau members, people from participating schools, the Soil & Water Conservation District, the Cornell Cooperative Extension, State Farm Insurance, the local electric company and the volunteer ambulance corps. Twenty-five learning stations are organized in five loops around the fairgrounds. Weber says that kids love the activities, and stations like the sheriff's teaching dog and animal safety are always popular.

The Oswego County FS4JK chapter creates their own Safety Activity Book for each student to take home. They solicit insurance companies, county sheriffs, labor unions and other organizations to sponsor pages in the book. The Farm-City Council honored the Oswego County Farm Bureau group last year with a national safety award.

Nancy and her husband, Sam, raised their two now-grown children on their 65-cow dairy. Sam III now farms with his parents. Their daughter, Bethany Russell, is married to a dairy farmer and works for NOFA advising dairy farmers in transition to organic certification.

Helping others avoid tragedy

"Kids have to be super-aware, and parents have to be super-aware" of farm safety, Weber says. "We're not just talking about farm kids—all children, and all types of farms need to be involved." The Webers experienced a tragedy at their farm about 15 years ago that drives home the point that visiting children are at risk.

Unseen by the Webers' employee, who was driving a tractor with chopper

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and forage wagon out to a field, an uninvited 12-year-old neighbor boy had followed closely behind the wagon on his bike. The operator pulled into

the field and began chopping haylage. Without warning, the boy rode up close to the tractor, threw down his bike, ran to jump onto the moving tractor and was killed. Still shaken, Weber hopes telling the story helps others be more vigilant.

“Bury a Tradition” campaign

Weber and Crowningshield are

Get more information:

- Farm Safety 4 Just Kids: For information on programs, educational materials or forming a chapter www.fs4jk.org or call 800-423-5437

- For more information, to download “Bury a Tradition” posters in English, Spanish and French, and other educational materials, go to the CASN Web site at www.childagsafety.org, which also has links to member organizations.

- See the North American Guidelines for Children’s Agricultural Tasks at www.nagcat.org for advice on how and when to teach a young person to operate a tractor safely.

- Regina Fisher, agricultural youth safety specialist at the National Children’s Center in Marshfield, Wis. Call 800-662-6900 or e-mail nccrahs@mflclin.edu.



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both strong supporters of the "Bury a Tradition" campaign to keep kids off tractors. The Childhood Agricultural Safety Network (CASN), a coalition of organizations and government agencies in the United States and Canada wants to bury the tradition of children on tractors once and for all. Farm Safety 4 Just Kids is a founding member of CASN.

The campaign aims to protect children, but the message targets adults: It's easier to bury a tradition than a child. "We're trying to shake people up in terms of traditional practices," explains Barbara Lee, director of the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety in Marshfield, Wis. The idea is to change farm safety behavior to get the kinds of public health gains that have benefited children across society. Widespread adoption and use of child-safety seats, seat belts, bicycle and horseback riding helmets and, now, downhill skiing helmets, have all reduced childhood deaths and injuries.

Yet, a child is killed on a farm

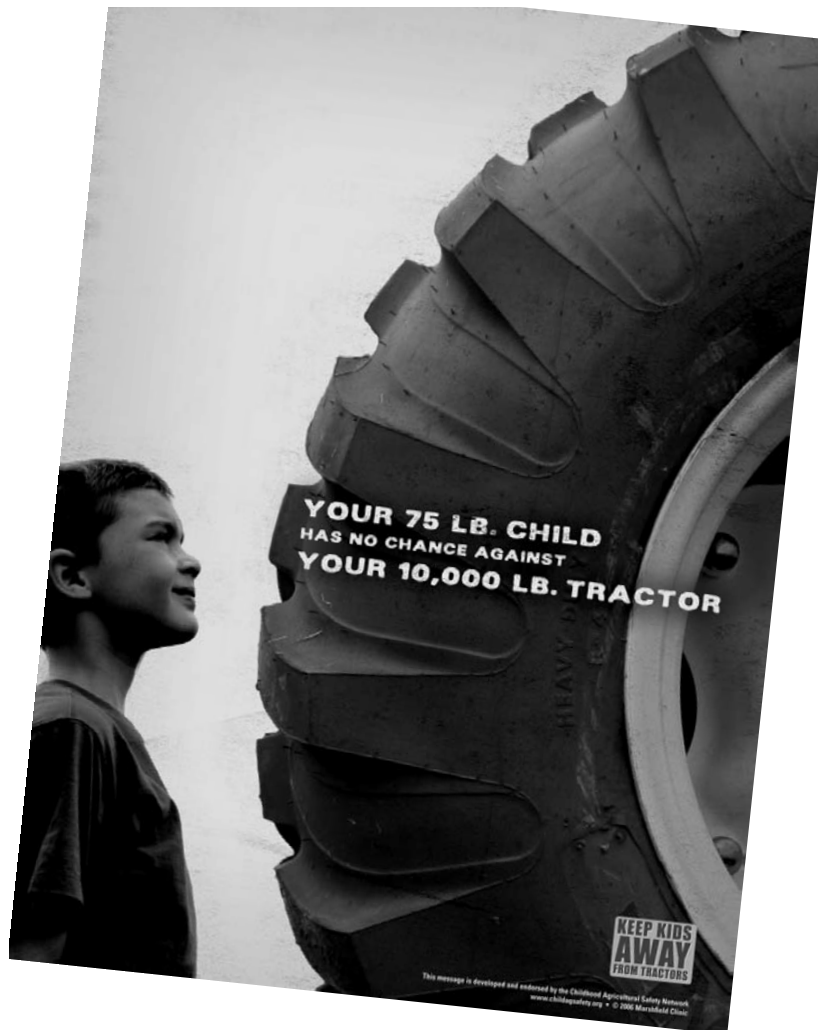
somewhere in the United States every three and a half days. Tractors are involved in 41 percent of farm deaths of children under 15. A Pennsylvania study found that 43 percent of tractor run-over fatalities were under 15 years of age. Still, according to CASN, four out of five farm children regularly ride on tractors with family members.

"The tragedies that happen can be avoided," asserts Weber. "It's just so not an OK thing to do."

"I think the campaign is great, but will be hard to execute," Crowningshield says of the "Bury a Tradition" effort. Crowningshield, who grew up on a dairy farm in Ohio, lost a childhood friend. The 10-year-old farm girl was killed when her sweatshirt hood was caught in a PTO shaft.

"You get caught up in the work you're doing," Weber says of the challenges for farm families in keeping kids safe. ♦

The author is a partner in a dairy farm, agricultural columnist and freelance writer.





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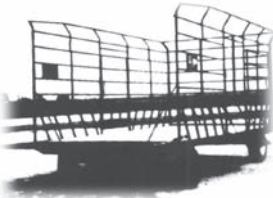
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