



## Voluntary Guidelines for Youth Employment

These voluntary guidelines pertain to hired adolescent workers ages 14 to 17 years.

### Training and Supervision

- Youth under age 18 should always work under direct visual supervision (close proximity) of at least one responsible adult supervisor who is physically present at the worksite/location.
- Training for young hired workers should include clear communication and documentation of the allowed and prohibited work activity in and around the workplace, as well as the rights and responsibilities for themselves and others in the work environment.
- Training for all supervisors of hired workers under 18 should include instruction about:
  - Existing age-based work rules
  - Physical and cognitive abilities of youth
  - Need for extra supervision and frequent training
  - Basic emergency response practices, both general and specific to the workplace
  - Harassment prevention, including sexual harassment

### Job Assignments: General

- All farms that intend to employ youth should implement a formal worksite hazard assessment program, including regularly updated safety checklists, accident prevention programs, and regular review of health and safety procedures to ensure they are current with existing requirements and recommendations.
- All manufacturer directions/manuals and applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations must be followed. This includes, but is not limited to, those with age, size, training and certification requirements.
- Job assignments for 14- and 15-year-olds should occur in non-hazardous work only. Work conditions should include specific protections relative to livestock, machinery, and crop protection products, and with written parental consent. There should be assurances that schooling is not disrupted.
- There should be increased but still limited employment opportunities for 16- and 17-year-old youth with restrictions on performing hazardous work activities. These activities can be expanded for those enrolled in approved technical or vocational programs such as FFA or other work-based learning programs, in which instruction in the use of powered equipment and safe work practices around livestock is provided, tested, and certified. Written parental consent must also be obtained.
- Those under age 18 should not be the onsite/in-field designated “responsible” party for emergency response (unless specifically trained/certified as an emergency first-aid responder).
- Noise exposure is a recognized hazard in farming and as such, youth should be provided with appropriate hearing protection and training in hearing conservation strategies (i.e., walk away, turn it down, or wear protection).

### Job Assignments: Specific

- Mixing, loading, or application of pesticides should not be done by hired workers under age 18.
- Youth under age 18 should not operate moving equipment in close proximity to other workers, operate equipment that others ride, or provide on-the-job transportation to other workers.
- Generally, workers under age 18 should not drive farm machinery on or across public roads or highways, unless they have received documented training and are licensed or certified to operate the specific farm vehicles.
- No one under age 18 should operate tractors or other ride-on machinery that is not equipped with ROPS and seat belts, and employees must use the safety equipment at all times.
- Certain types of equipment account for a large percentage of on-farm injuries due to complexity of operation, speed, power, or other reasons. Therefore, strong consideration should be given to age, machine-specific training, and experience requirements for any employee allowed to operate this type of equipment. Examples include large tractors, ATVs, skid-steer loaders, augers/conveyers, elevators, chain saws and stationary power equipment requiring hand-feeding such as chippers.
- Hired workers under age 18 should not work on, around, or in grain handling facilities or confined spaces including, but not limited to, upright silos, grain bins, or manure pits/tanks.
- Hired workers under age 18 should not be permitted to engage in work where they handle or come into contact with tobacco in any form.
- Work involving prolonged exposure to extreme heat, cold and other adverse outdoor weather conditions such as storms should be limited. Youth should be given more frequent breaks than what is recommended for adults and opportunities for ample hydration made available. Training regarding symptoms of heat stress and hypothermia, which is a dangerous drop in body temperature from cold exposure, and prevention strategies should be provided. Additional information for dealing with adverse weather conditions should also be in place. For instance, instructions should be provided to youth to contact the supervisor when weather conditions change and making operating equipment more unpredictable and hazardous.

### Work Hours

- Employment conditions for 14- and 15-year-old youth should include daily work hour limits, as well as start and stop times that are comparable for this age-group in non-agricultural employment.
- There should be specific start and stop times for 16- and 17-year-olds that may differ during the school-year versus non-school year, and even between school nights and weekends to assure students have adequate rest and study time.
- Those 16- and 17- year-olds who are not enrolled in school, and who support themselves, may be subject to fewer restrictions with regard to hours of work, although hazardous operations would remain off-limits without student learner or other certified training program participation.
- Overnight shift work in field operations should never be assigned to workers younger than 18 years.

*Acknowledgement: Funding for this project was provided by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Award 5U54OH009568 through the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety [www.marshfieldclinic.org/nccrahs](http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/nccrahs). [The policy does not reflect an official position of NIOSH as the primary funding agency].*