

An Assessment of Farm Families' Lived Realities Raising Children on Farms



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Background: Farm children have a significantly increased risk of injury and fatality than the general population. Farm safety scholars have long recommended that adults supervise children, away from the farm worksite as a safety precaution. Despite this long-standing recommendation, many farm parents continue to bring their children to the worksite. Understanding farm parents' lived realities raising children on farms will help develop and refine farm safety interventions. This includes developing an in-depth

understanding of the factors that shape farm parents' childcare decisions, as well as how childcare intersects with safety, family and community wellbeing, and farm business viability.

Method: We used survey data from 860 farm parents raising children in 47 states. The survey included a mix of 53 items that examined household demographics, farm characteristics, safety practices, and childcare and schooling arrangements. Using univariate and bivariate analyses in STATA, we examined factors that farm parents navigate when making childcare decisions, including availability, cost, and child safety strategies.

Results: Our findings indicate wide variability in childcare arrangements based on inhibiting factors, parental priorities, and safety strategies. Parents reported that cost and availability were the two most influential factors to accessing childcare outside of the active farm worksite. Family and friends were a preferred source of childcare due to cost and flexibility factors, yet some family and friends were unable to help due to long distance or competing business or health priorities. Overall, childcare challenges increase children's exposure to danger and negatively impact the financial viability of the farm business.

Conclusions: The farm safety literature often frames the presence of children on the farm worksite as a matter of personal choice and tradition. Our findings indicate that, while farm parents generally enjoy having their children around, inadequate childcare supply is a major barrier. These findings highlight the need for future interventions that can address childcare access and affordability to ease the adoption of better farm safety practices.