

DON'T SEND A CHILD TO DO AN ADULT'S JOB

Farm work is complex and can be hazardous, stakes are high



Children and teens are not small adults. You can't assume they are grown just because their bodies look grown. To know whether a child or youth is ready to work on the farm, you have to consider whether the brain is as developed as the biceps.

Bad things can happen:

- A 10-year-old boy died when the tractor he was driving overturned while pulling a baler and loaded hayrack. The incident occurred when he turned off a highway onto a gravel road. The rear wheels began to slide. The momentum of the baler, hayrack and hay made the slide worse. The tractor overturned at the edge of the road.
- A 10-year-old girl lost part of her right arm when it became caught in an auger while working on her family's farm. She was helping to feed cattle.
- An 11 year-old died when he was pinned under the tractor he was driving. The victim was work-

ing by himself moving large round bales of hay with a bale spear attached to the rear of the tractor. The tractor did not have a rollbar.

What do these incidents have in common? The children were in over their heads. They did not have the ability to avoid the hazardous circumstances, nor think quickly enough to recognize and react to danger. More appropriate jobs might include hand-harvesting produce, picking rocks, feeding milk to calves and cleaning the service alley of a barn.

Consider the consequences

Between 35 and 40 percent of working youth injuries and deaths occur when they are doing developmentally inappropriate work. Parents and adults should not assume a child or teen is uniquely "mature" and able to handle tasks beyond his/her ability, nor assume a their work results will be the same quality and completed at the same speed as adults.

Rushing child development

"Children develop at a certain rate," said David Schwebel, child developmental psychologist, University of Alabama at Birmingham. "We might be able to push that development a little with good training and teaching. But the human brain has a certain capacity, and it is hard to speed that capacity beyond what the human brain is built for at a particular age."

- **Cognitive:** Children cannot absorb and process information as fast as adults. They cannot make decisions as quickly or logically. Their attention spans are shorter, they lack impulse control and they cannot easily translate a message learned from one scenario to another.
- **Perceptual:** Children cannot accurately gauge their ability. They can't judge the speed of moving traffic. They have difficulty judging distances of objects, the angle of incline or decline, and recognizing hazards in the environment.
- **Physical:** Children's strength, reach, balance and coordination are inferior to adults. Children do not have the same visual perspective as adults.

Action steps

Use the Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines (AYWG) to:

- Assign jobs appropriate for a youth's age and ability.
- Learn the adult responsibilities associated with supervising youth.
- Identify and address the hazards and follow the protective strategies for various jobs.

