**Be Careful When Employing Youth to Do Farm Work This Spring – Know the Laws**

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With schools closing early due to COVID-19, some youth have become available for full- and part-time employment. Farm operators, however, need to remain mindful that the employment of youth under the age of 16 to work in agriculture is regulated by Federal Wage and Hour Laws. Youth ages 14 and 15, specifically, can perform certain farm tasks, not classified as hazardous, provided the work does not interfere with school (including completing online schooling) and appropriate wages are paid. Some of the tasks that are allowable include:

* Hand pruning Christmas trees
* Mowing lawns
* Picking berries
* Operating a tractor, including garden tractor under 20 h.p.
* Loading and unloading small hay bales from wagons
* Painting, but not over 20 feet from the ground
* Setting fence posts and repairing fences.

Some tasks are recognized as particularly hazardous for youth and either cannot be performed by youth under the age of 16 at any time, or only after having first received special training.

**Prohibited** tasks include:

* Operating specialized machinery such as earth moving equipment, forklifts, potato combines, or chain saws
* Working with bulls, boars, stud horses, sows with suckling pigs, or cows with newborn calves present
* Working in woodlots to harvest timber
* Working over 20 feet from the ground on scaffolding or ladders
* Working inside agricultural confined spaces, included silos, grain bins, and manure pits
* Transporting, transferring or applying anhydrous ammonia

In some cases, youth ages 14 and 15 may be employed to operate a tractor over 20 PTO horsepower, or operate certain types of other farm machinery, but ***only*** after completing an approved training course (see [**www.agsafety4youth.info**](http://www.agsafety4youth.info) for more details).

Employees found hiring youth to perform farm tasks considered hazardous can be fined. There have been cases in which farmers have spent time in jail due to the death of an under-aged worker performing prohibited tasks.

For more information on tasks that young workers can legally perform on the farm and which are specifically forbidden, contact the local office of the State Department of Labor and check out the resources available from Purdue University’s website [**www.agsafety4youth.info**](http://www.agsafety4youth.info). This site also provides excellent training resources for young and beginning workers.

It should be noted that the restrictions to the employment of youth on farms do not apply to a youth employed by his or her parent or guardian on farms owned by the parent or guardian. Once a youth reaches the age of 16, there are no age-related legal restrictions on employment in production agriculture.