

# SAFETY BREAK

## Spring 2018

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*Produced by Alberta Farm Safety Program, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry*



*Taking adequate breaks is important for the mind and body.*

### NURTURING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS ON THE FARM

Most Alberta farm operations are family-based businesses where farmers live, work and play. Because of this, it can be hard to get away from the daily grind.

Daily chores, inclement weather, business planning and financial management can be a lot for a person to handle. It is important that farm owners and family members know the signs and symptoms of fatigue, anxiety and depression.

“When you begin to feel overwhelmed or burnt out, one of the best things you can do is call a timeout, step back and take a moment for yourself. When you take time for yourself, you are giving your mind and body a break and time to re-energize,” says Dr. Nicholas Mitchell, Senior Medical Director with Addiction and Mental Health Strategic Clinical Network.

Those who are feeling effects of fatigue, anxiety or depression may:

- Feel sad, grumpy or moody
- Lose interest in their usual activities
- Eat more and crave carbohydrates, such as bread and pasta
- Gain weight
- Sleep more but still feel tired
- Have trouble concentrating
- Have thoughts that life is not worth living

“There is no reason to wait until you are feeling burnt out to make time for yourself a priority. Building breaks into your days can help keep stress from mounting,” says Dr. Mitchell.

Some ways to help focus on yourself and combat these feelings are:

- Regular exercise is one of the best things you can do for yourself
- Particularly this time of year, getting more sunlight may help, so try to get outside to exercise when the sun is shining
- Being active during the daytime, especially early in the day, may help you have more energy and feel less anxious or depressed
- Ensure your body is getting proper nutrition and hydration
- Speak to your physician if your symptoms go on for two weeks or more

For more information on stress, stress management and how to identify stress, contact Health Link Alberta at 811 or visit [www.myhealth.ab.ca](http://www.myhealth.ab.ca). For more information on farm safety, visit the Alberta Farm Safety Program at [www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety).



*Calm animals are generally safer animals. Limiting an animal's exposure to situations that trigger fear and anxiety can help workers avoid unnecessary hazards.*

## KNOWING ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR IS KEY TO LIVESTOCK HANDLING SAFETY

Many Alberta farms are particularly busy working with livestock at this time of year. Through the stress of calving, lambing, sorting, processing, and relocating — often during inclement weather — farmers and ranchers need to consider their safety and that of others while tending to their animals.

“The biggest factor in livestock handling safety is understanding animal behaviour,” says Jennifer Woods, livestock handling specialist based in Blackie, Alberta. “Workers need to be trained in this aspect before they are tasked with handling livestock. It is important to know that animals don’t necessarily react to their environment the way we would expect.”

Many times, the cause of injury to handlers is overconfidence in their ability to predict or read animal behaviour. Workers can get too complacent and not pay attention to the situation.

“What makes animal behaviour so different from humans is that animals truly live in the moment and react accordingly to the things they hear, smell, see, and feel. People usually do not perceive the same things animals perceive,” says Woods.

In general, calm animals are safer animals, and the best way to keep them calm while handling them is to reduce fear and anxiety. As a prey species, cattle have an inherent fear of unfamiliar objects, situations, smells, sudden movements, and noises. Animals that are singled out of a herd, injured or sick, are also more fearful.

Woods points out the indicators when animals tend to be more unpredictable, and handlers must be particularly cautious. They are:

- During breeding season
- During calving/lambing/foaling
- When animals are alone
- When animals have been harassed by a predator
- When animals are injured or sick
- When animals are in an unfamiliar environment or around unfamiliar handlers

Other contributors to worker safety are the condition of the handling equipment and facilities, proximity of the handler to the livestock, and the physical size of the worker handling the livestock. Small children are at a considerable size disadvantage for many tasks, for example. In particular, workers need to be aware when they are in the kick zone of cattle.

For long-term worker safety, Woods advises handlers to cull dangerous cows. “If there is a risk of them hurting a worker or family member, it is not worth it to keep them around. Even if that cow is a good producer, she will pass her bad behaviour on to her calves, and you don’t want that perpetuating in your herd.”

As for sheep, Woods says that the smaller animals, generally speaking, tend to be more likely to get hurt during processing than a worker, but you still need to pay attention to avoid getting butted or knocked over. Although extra caution needs to be taken with rams as they can be quite dangerous. She cautions that sheep can take a child out in a minute, “Adult supervisors need to make sure children are out of harm’s way during all aspects of livestock handling.”

More information on livestock handling can be viewed on Woods’ website at [www.livestockhandling.net](http://www.livestockhandling.net). For more information farm safety, go to [www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety](http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety).



*Make sure your equipment is clearly visible, has proper signage, and is in good repair before transporting on public roads.*



*Parent Alert: Wearing a helmet while horseback riding can help to reduce the risk and severity of a potential head injury.*

For more information on this and other farm safety topics, visit [agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety](http://agriculture.alberta.ca/farmsafety).

## REVAMPED SAFE TRANSPORTATION OF FARM EQUIPMENT IN ALBERTA NOW AVAILABLE

During spring season, farmers often travel long distances between fields, which may require transporting equipment on public roads throughout rural Alberta.

“Along with the rest of the preparation for spring seeding comes tasks like equipment maintenance and inspection,” says Nicole Hornett, farm safety specialist for Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. “Equipment owners and operators are responsible for maintaining the safety of their equipment, which also includes adequate lighting and markings to increase visibility.”

Recently, Alberta Farm Safety Program staff, in collaboration with transportation safety specialists, revamped the *Safe Transportation of Farm Equipment in Alberta* publication. “The booklet still contains information on the road and transportation safety regulations for tractors, self-propelled implements and towed implements, in addition to a new section on power line safety and high load moves,” says Hornett.

The publication is written to reflect the *Traffic Safety Act* but does not supersede it. Inside, readers will find illustrations on how to adequately mark farm equipment for both daytime and nighttime travel. “Diagrams in the book show how and where to display a slow-moving vehicle (SMV) sign on the tractor or self-propelled implement that will be travelling at speeds less than 40 km/h,” says Hornett.

Any towed implements, like air seeders, must also have their own clearly visible SMV sign when travelling at speeds slower than 40 km/h. “Alerting other drivers of your machinery’s size, width and slower speeds with headlamps, tail lamps, marker lights, SMV signage, reflective tape and warning flags helps to reduce collisions,” says Hornett.

Preventing collisions focuses on three main areas: making equipment safe and visible, following safe driving tips, and driving defensively. “This publication is an excellent refresher or reference guide for an experienced operator and could be used as part of a training program for a new operator,” says Hornett. “The first section in the booklet outlines known types of collisions and how to prevent them.”

In section one, operators are reminded of the factors at play for both single and multiple-vehicle collisions. Prevention information immediately follows, complete with photos and safety tips.

To obtain a copy of the new *Safe Transportation of Farm Equipment in Alberta*, contact the Alberta Farm Safety Program at [farm.safety@gov.ab.ca](mailto:farm.safety@gov.ab.ca).

## PARENT ALERT: THE HAZARDS OF LIVESTOCK

Chores involving livestock care and handling are often some of the first responsibilities given to children on the farm. However, injuries from livestock continues to be a risk. Factors contributing to the risk are size difference, unpredictable behaviour, and children’s lack of knowledge or skill. To reduce the risk of injury to children caused by livestock, consider implementing the following safety strategies on your farming operation:

- Lead by example — a great way to reinforce smart choices among children.
- Teach your child the basics of animal behaviour and to recognize triggers that could make them react unpredictably.
- Designate and communicate escape routes before enter livestock enclosures.
- Keep livestock pens off limits to children without adult supervision. Apply “No Play Area” decals as a visual reminder.
- Provide the proper gear for handling or riding animals and ensure your child uses it.
- Ensure calm, quiet and steady interaction with livestock to reduce the chance of injury.