

Panic Pierces The Heart

(Continued from Page A24)

They are gone — kidnapped. That's got to be my ultimate fear

—my child being kidnapped. I just can't imagine the loss of my children. Yet why should I fear a

kidnapping?

Another scenario has proven to be more dangerous.

It might take place at the PTO shaft, the gravity box wagon, the silo, or the extra rider site on the tractor.

Yes, this scenario is our farms. Each year about 300 kids are taken from our farms. No, not by kidnapers but by our own neglect. Whether it be crushing in a tractor roll over, suffocation in a gravity box wagon, an arm caught in an auger, or pants caught in the PTO. We kill too many farm kids.

This past week was National Safe Kids Week. Whether you are on the farm or live in town, it's time we sit up and take note. There are too many accidents around us. We are injuring and yes, even killing too many children.

Let's see what we can do to save our children.

Farms have always been hazardous work places. But trauma in children on farms is occurring in epidemic proportions. Farming is now the most dangerous occupation and children bear the brunt of the accident load.

In fact, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Indiana, and Wisconsin data shows that 14 percent to 24 percent of total farm accidents involve children under the age of 16.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the dangers for children on farms. Many of these same factors can be felt around the home.

Increased Mechanization — Machinery injuries have surpassed other types of injuries, and are a major cause of fatalities among farm kids. Many of these injuries are caused by old equipment manufactured prior to safety standards. However, modern equipment may endanger more kids just because it's easier to operate. Hence, we think kids are capable of doing the task.

Stressful Economic Conditions — Tight financial times may be placing more and more smaller children in the role of hired hand. But, maybe more of a factor is that parents have gone off the farm to find additional employment to make ends meet. Thus kids may have less supervision. Studies have shown that when

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you adjust for the amount of time each worker is in the workplace, children have nearly a 50 percent higher accident rate.

So, what can be done to turn this alarming fact around?

There may be a lot of alternatives — required safety classes with lowered insurance premiums, federal standards for machinery, mandatory safety devices, or tougher laws.

The things that I find puzzling though is why? Why do we have to have someone else force us to clean up our act. Why not do it for our children's sake — for our family's sake!

There are some barriers on the farm. First, farmers live in the midst of their work and many children and adults simply aren't aware of the danger — the hazards.

Secondly, there is a strong desire to instill the "work ethic." "It's our rural belief that kids should help with farm work,"

states Bob Abern, University of Illinois Extension Safety Specialist. "But the benefits often don't outweigh the risks."

The third factor is that farmers like to avoid government regulations. Farm kids, working on the family farm, don't have to be licensed, or in fact even trained, to operate equipment or perform adult jobs.

The fact is no other industry tolerates children being killed like agriculture does. To me that's deplorable.

The 4-H Program in Lebanon County has been on the move to change this trend. Six years ago one of my 4-H moms came to me and wanted to start something new — a 4-H Tractor Safety Program. She was very concerned about keeping farm kids safe and so was I.

With a sense of urgency, enthusiasm and vengeance, the Lebanon

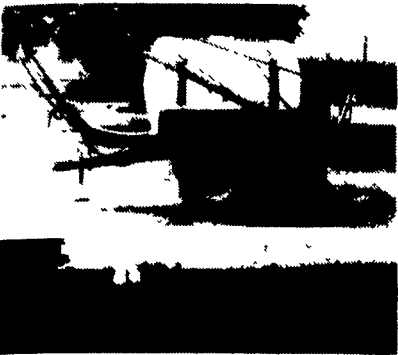
(Turn to Page A29)



4-H leader Ronnie Lehman presents Jeremy Troutman with a certificate of recognition for winning the 1992 Penn State 4-H Achievement Days Tractor Driving contest. As the state's representative in the national level of competition, Troutman went on to place fifth.

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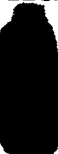
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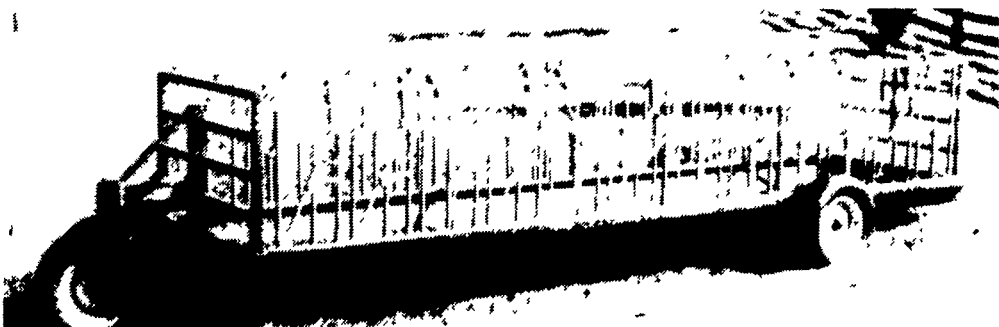
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