

Planting the right messages may make farms safer

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This is a tractor laying on its side after a rollover. Credit: Penn State

Better marketing tactics may lead to improved safety in one of the nation's most dangerous occupations -- farming, according to Penn State researchers.

"Along with mining and construction, farming is one of the top three most hazardous industries," said Aaron Yoder, instructor of agricultural and [biological engineering](#). "Farming is also less regulated and has more exemptions than other industries."

Social marketing campaigns that focus on the benefits of and barriers to persuading people to change behaviors could help raise awareness about

farm [safety](#) issues, said Yoder said. In the past, organizations have used social marketing tactics in creating successful campaigns to change such behaviors, as smoking and overeating.

"When we think of marketing, we usually think of using it to sell something, but in the case of social marketing, we're using it to try to change behaviors," said Yoder.

Yoder, who worked with Dennis Murphy, Distinguished Professor of agricultural safety and health, studied how social marketing principles could be used to persuade people to install rollover protective structures -- ROPS -- on older-model tractors. A ROPS consists of a frame and a seat belt that offers protection to the driver if the tractor rolls over. Between 2000 and 2008, 58 people died in farm-related, tractor-rollover accidents in Pennsylvania alone, according to Yoder.

The researchers used surveys and focus groups to gather information about what would motivate farmers to buy and install a ROPS on an older-model tractor, and what barriers prevent them from installing the equipment. They published their findings in the *Journal of Agromedicine* and will present the information at the International Society for Agricultural Safety and Health conference on June 28 in Burlington, Vt.

Participants in the focus groups indicated that cost was one barrier, but offering a rebate on the ROPS could serve as motivator to persuade farmers to install the device, the researchers found. Yoder said adding rollover bars to the tractors would cost about \$1,000. He said a rebate that cut that cost by 70 percent was considered a strong motivator.

The participants indicated that child safety would also motivate them to install safety equipment.

"They wanted to protect their kids," said Yoder. "They may not be too

worried about their own safety, but they want to keep their kids safe."

[Social marketing](#) campaigns could be used for other farm safety issues, such as adding safety guards to equipment and determining age-appropriate tasks for children who work on farms, according to the researchers. The campaigns could also help raise awareness for the proper instruction of farm equipment, which can range from complex harvesting equipment to all-terrain vehicles.

Yoder said most of focus group participants were drawn from crop farms under 100 acres. Those farmers tended to use older, unprotected equipment and were most open to learning new techniques to improve farm safety. They also were more likely to be new to farming.

"We're seeing more of these types of farmers, too, who are coming into the industry from other types of occupations," said Yoder. "Which is actually a good thing because they also seem more open to new ideas and appreciate the information we pass on."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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