

News Column

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TRACTOR SAFETY COURSE

Here's some good advice from someone who learned the hard way — teach your son to drive a stick shift vehicle before you hop on the drawbar to teach him to drive an old cab-less tractor. Think about it. Would you rather be jerked around in the passenger seat, or do you want to be dumped off the back of the tractor when he pops the clutch the first time?

When my son attended our tractor safety course a few years ago he was one of the kids who had never been on a tractor,...except to have his picture taken with his sisters when he was really small. He was 13 years old when he attended the class, sort of a farm kid, and had zero experience operating a tractor.

You might conclude – and you would be accurate in doing so – that we don't have much of a farm, if my son wasn't operating a tractor by the time he was 13. Your conclusion that we are hobby farmers would be correct, but the logic that got you there might be flawed. You see, I grew up on a real farm and my dad didn't let me operate a tractor until I was 13 years old.

I believe Dad was legitimately concerned about our well-being and consciously made the decision to not put any of his three boys on a tractor at a young age. However, I suspect he also had an aversion to fence repair, and was convinced we would run the old International I-9 through a fence if he let us drive when we were young.

I was ten when the old International got retired and replaced by a brand new 1030 Case, so I never drove the old tractor. The International had no power steering. Dad insisted I would

drive right through the fence when I got to the other end because I wouldn't be strong enough to make it turn. That's the excuse he gave me for not turning me loose on my own.

When I was 13 and a freshman in high school, one of my friends was killed in a tractor accident. That's when I understood why Dad had been holding me back for so many years. Ironically, it is also the same year he started letting me do field work with the "new" 1030 Case.

I know now that I should have taken a tractor safety course before I started working on the farm. It wouldn't have been required by law because I only worked for my parents, but it would have been wise nonetheless.

The law requiring certification in tractor safety only affects 14 and 15 year old youths who will operate a tractor for someone other than their parent. Those younger than 14 cannot be legally employed in hazardous work (tractor driving). Employees 16 years of age and older are not required to attend a tractor safety class.

These days, most farm parents enroll their children in a tractor safety course – also known as a Hazardous Occupations Safety Training in Agriculture course – when they are 14 years old. Even though they intend for them to only work on their own farm, they know safety training is a good investment.

We teach a tractor safety course every year in cooperation with Extension Agents in nearby counties. This year's course will be held on Tuesday, May 28 and Wednesday, May 29 at KanEquip in Wamego. Class will run from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. the first day and from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. the second day.

There is a \$30 course fee that covers the cost of class materials and lunch both days. The registration deadline is May 22 and participants can register online at www.pottawatomie.ksu.edu.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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