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Extension Looks to CVTC as Tractor Safety Partner

Class draws adults as well as youth

Eau Claire, WI – Having children involved in chores around the farm is as old as agriculture itself. But when children share in the farm duties, they also share in the risk.

That's why the University of Wisconsin-Extension offers farm safety classes. This year for the first time, the UW-Extension offices in Eau Claire and Dunn counties have partnered with Chippewa Valley Technical College for their annual Tractor Safety class.

"Extension has been holding tractor safety classes for multiple generations," said Mark Hagedorn, Eau Claire County UW-Extension ag agent. "But after the hard winter and the effect on school district resources, it was difficult to fit it into the after-school time frame where we've had it before."

The solution was a class lasting three full days June 26-28 at CVTC's Energy Education Center, attended by 18 students.

The overall goal of the classes is to raise safety awareness in what can be a dangerous industry. In 2016, 417 farmers and farm workers died from work-related injuries, a high rate of 21.4 deaths per 100,000 workers, according to the National Institute of Occupational Safety. The most common cause of fatalities is tractor roll-overs.

The class also has a specific purpose for most young students.

"They can get a state certificate to drive tractors for their parents at age 12," said Brent Christianson, CVTC Agronomy instructor, who helped teach the class. "But those 13 and older can get a federal certification allowing them to drive tractors for an employer at age 14."

The class wrapped up with written and on-tractor performance tests.

"The class is not just learning about driving the tractor, but learning about safety all around the tractor," said Katie Wantoch, Dunn County ag agent.

Bandi Hetke, CVTC Electrical Power Distribution instructor, made a presentation to the class inside the program's "hot lab." He reviewed the dangers of farm equipment making contact with power lines.

“Bandi told us what to do when equipment runs into power lines,” said Brian Zimmerman, 13, of Osseo. “He said don’t move until people get there and turn the power off.”

Regi Geissler, a trauma coordinator for HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospital in Chippewa Falls, taught a section on farm injuries. One day, the students toured North Road Dairy in rural Colfax where one of the tasks was to identify hazards. An instructor from CVTC’s FireMedic program covered fire extinguisher training with North Star fire extinguisher equipment.

“We also covered basic farm safety, tractor controls and proper operations and connecting and using implements,” Christianson said.

Hunter Dresel, 13, of Colfax, said he has been on tractors with his dad since about age 8, but is learning from the class. “When you get on a tractor, you should have three points of contact,” he said, noting one thing he learned.

“Sometimes people fall into the power take off shaft,” said Joe Shong, 13, of Osseo. “We’re learning how to properly shut off the engine and maintain it, and how to avoid hazards.”

Not all of the students were youths. Jaime Najbrt, 41, of Menomonie, said she took the class along with her daughter, Jasmine, who lives on a farm and as cattle. “I wanted her to take it and I wanted to know what they were teaching,” Najbrt said. “I’m learning a lot about safety, the components of a tractor and the things you have to control.”

Madison Gray, 24, of Mondovi, is a student in CVTC’s Animal Science program who thought she would benefit from the class.

“My family has raised beef cattle since before I was born, and we raise crops too,” Gray said. “I wanted to learn more about tractors so I could work more on the farm. I drove tractor a little bit as a teenager, but I never really needed to drive much.”

Adam Wehling, dean of agriculture, energy and transportation at CVTC noted that Tractor Central, Value Implement and Lindstrom Equipment provided tractors and other farm equipment for the class.

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Cutlines:

Colfax photo:

Santiago Cabal, a CVTC Agronomy program graduate helping as an instructor for the Tractor Safety class, explains to Eli Ralph, 13, of Colfax, a process he is to follow in practicing for the final test at CVTC’s Energy Education Center Friday, June 28.

Menomonie photo:

Wyatt Wagoner of Menomonie practices backing a tractor into position for hooking to an implement at the Tractor Safety class at CVTC's Energy Education Center June 28.

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