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'Luckiest grandpa in the world' takes steps to keep family safe

By Brandi Janssen and Jackie Curnick

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Gary Stripe and his grandson Coy with the 1965 International tractor they retrofitted with a ROPS and canopy using the National ROPS Rebate Program.

Photo courtesy Gary Stripe

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If you have spent time with young people working in agriculture, be it through FFA, 4-H or your own family, you probably came away feeling pretty good about the future of farming. That is certainly true for Gary Stripe in Garden Grove, Iowa, who is proud to have two grandsons, ages 19 and 15. They are the future farmers of the land his father bought in 1964.

Stripe says, “I tell you what, I’m probably the luckiest grandpa in the world! The two grandsons, my son and his wife, live a half mile from us. I got a couple Stripes down the road that will help us carry on the farm tradition.”



But Stripe also knows firsthand the dangers that come along with farming.

“When I was a kid, my dad bought our first farm. I drove a tractor over what looked like a gopher hole, but it was all caved in — it was an old tile line — and I laid it down on its side,” he says. “I was really lucky I stayed in the seat. I could have just as well been underneath it.”

When it came time for Stripe’s 15-year-old grandson, Coy, to have his own tractor, safety considerations were top of mind, especially roll-over protection. Stripe tapped into state funding available through Iowa’s Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the National ROPS Rebate Program to install a Rollover Protective Structure (ROPS) on their newly purchased 1965 International 706.

The tractor Stripe bought for his older grandson a few years ago had a cab. But when it came time to find a tractor for Coy, he told his grandpa, “I want an open station tractor so I can work on my tan!”

Stripe reflected on other rollover incidents in his neighborhood. Two of his neighbors, one of whom was a schoolmate, were killed in separate rollovers within the last 10 years.

“So I decided Coy could get a tractor and still get his sunlight, but he needed something safer on top,” he says. “Because things happen.”

Sadly, the deaths that have occurred in Stripe's neighborhood are not unusual. According to data from the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health, Iowa leads the country in tractor overturn deaths, accounting for 12% of deaths nationally.

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Stripe and his grandsons are looking forward to fully restoring the tractor. There is a minor oil leak and the seat needs to be replaced. They hope to paint it by this winter. Their goal is to get it back to original condition, with the improvement of a ROPS.

Stripe notes, "It should be a show tractor, but we use it."

Even though some farmers think that a ROPS doesn't look good on an old tractor, Stripe says, "I was jealous when I was a kid and some neighbor boys had ROPS on their tractors. I thought those guys were really uptown, you know. We didn't have anything that nice, we just had a little umbrella on ours."

The National ROPS Rebate Program is based in New York. The program will let you know if there is funding available in your state and can help source ROPS for your tractor. In Iowa, there is limited funding available from the state budget through Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH). The program covers 70% of the cost of a ROPS but caps the out-of-pocket payment for the farmer at \$500. To get started, call the ROPS hotline at 877-767-7748 or go to **www.ropsr4u.org**.

The funding was a big help to the Stripe family when they purchased the tractor. They would not have had the extra cash on hand to pay for it out of pocket. Stripe says, “It means quite a bit to us.”

Stripe enjoys having his grandsons as part of the farming operation. Both Stripe grandsons are very involved in the farm. Coy is the designated cow-checker and spends almost every day after school out checking cattle.

Stripe says, “He does a lot of work, he’s very responsible and he just turned 15. He can run anything. But, things are gonna happen and I thought, you know, we’d better be safe.”

He is also proud of his two granddaughters.

One will graduate from Central College in Pella and is preparing for graduate school in biostatistics. The younger will start attending Central in the fall and will run track and play on the golf team. Stripe’s wife of 52 years is an avid baker and makes sure there is always something for the grandsons to eat when they drop by the house.

The ROPS Rebate Program helped provide peace of mind for the entire Stripe family as the next generation start their own farming journeys.

He says, “There are enough problems in the world today, but I don’t have to worry about my grandkids.”

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