

**Episode Title:** Women in Agriculture and PPE

**Summary:** We're continuing the Season 2 kickoff theme: women in agriculture. Karen Thornton devotes all of her time to agriculture, and today she will be discussing safety challenges from her experiences – from equipment fit to livestock handling.

**Expert:** Karen Thornton

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**Episode Quote:**

*"I have very small hands and a lot of hand tools are made for much larger hands."*

– Karen Thornton

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## Transcript

### 00:05 M. Bentley

Hello, and welcome to the FarmSafe Podcast brought to you by the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health. In the blink of an eye an injury can change your life and your farm forever. During each episode, we share firsthand stories and real-life tips for making safer and healthier decisions while on the farm.

We're keeping with the season two kickoff theme talking with women in agriculture. Karen Thorton devotes all of her time to agriculture, and today she will be discussing safety challenges from her experiences– from equipment fit to livestock handling.

Karen, would you like to give our listeners a little bit of background?

### 00:38 K. Thornton

Well, my name's Karen Thornton. I grew up in Eastern Iowa. I've been involved with agriculture since the 60s. I grew up on a beef farm. Back then farms were more diversified. They were smaller, but you had hay, you had oats, you had corn, we had cattle. It was very male dominated. 4H was split into boy's and girl's clubs, and you had to take home economics. You had to take sewing; you had to take cooking. You could take animal projects if you wanted them, but some things were restricted to females at that time.

### M. Bentley

What changes have you seen for women in agriculture?

### 01:13 K. Thornton

Some things have changed, other things have not changed much. My husband is not from the farm, and I raised, today I raised cattle, and I sell bulls. And anytime we have a buyer calling for bulls, even though my husband's name's not on there, if I answer the phone they ask to speak to my husband and then he'll immediately give the phone back to me because he knows nothing about cattle. So there still is, there still is that although women now much more about machinery, much much more women in agriculture and the universities. Now that is a lot more technology based, in in many cases it's, not all cases, but in many cases. I think if you look at more of the diversified specialty farm, you know, the vegetable farms maybe the grapes and that, you do see a lot more women in in those roles than in the old crop and row and and livestock roles.

### M. Bentley

See, you talked about working on the farm growing up on the farm, and now you currently even have one. Can you talk about any challenges you face due to being a woman on the farm?

### 02:11 K. Thornton

Well, equipment is made for men. Equipment is made for people that are are– I'm 5 foot 2, so it's made for much, much taller individuals than myself. The main thing on a lot of tractors is depressing the clutch fully. I have to actually pull myself up out of the seat

to fully depress the clutch, because my legs just are too short, and as much as you adjust the seat, I still can't get it close enough to do that.

**M. Bentley**

That's very dangerous! What other safety concerns do you have?

**02:36 K. Thornton**

Another thing, things are much bigger so you're ergonomically not correct, like just things from wheelbarrows and all the tools. Ergonomically you're having to use more of your body. You just can't tip a wheelbarrow without kind of going through a bunch of gyrations to make it work if you're not a taller person. I just think that a lot of hand tools are made for larger hands. I have very small hands and a lot of hand tools are made for very much larger hands.

**M. Bentley**

That is concerning. Can you talk about the projects you've been working on within your career?

**03:08 K. Thornton**

Well, within my career. I'm I actually work for Linn County Public Health, and I'm in environmentalist, so I'm not really straight down the path that I have but I have worked on trying to get safer accommodations with things such as ATVs and side by sides more and more people are entities, counties, state governments are line them on highways and on roads which are really not made for, and that's a whole nother lecture. So, it seems to be felt that that's a economic advantage to allow the these type of vehicles on roadways. So, if we can't stop it, then what we are doing is talking to the politicians as they craft the legislation, so that there's safer restrictions on the vehicles age, protection lighting, turns signals.

**M. Bentley**

So, between your career and working at home on the farm, what kind of advantages do you see for women in agriculture?

**K. Thornton**

Well, I really see women kind of stepping out of the shadows of agriculture. Now I mean you're still going to Is you go to the bank? You have to have your plan, and I think, women are really good at right. Those business plans, thinking about the whole thing rather than just their their one line or reasoning. As far as I I wanna sell bulls and so there there's a lot of things, now that that bring it more to the advantage where women are on an equal footing with men in the workplace with agriculture, absolutely although it's still hard it's Still, hard to get up in the trucks and the tractors when you're not quite tall enough.

**M. Bentley**

Karen also noted that while most hazards apply to both men and women, women often have to pay a little bit more attention to them. She also mentioned that women are typically the caretakers of the children in the family.

**K. Thornton**

I think there's still that I see a lot a lot of young women that are starting their families.

Something feel they need to bring their young children their toddler age children out out into the workplace for them. and if you're going to be a farmer with the machinery and the hazards. They really need to reevaluate doing that and treat it like you. Would any career where you would actually arrange childcare it it's just not safe to bring those young children, and then many are like, Oh, I'm teaching them to farm that's fine but baby, steps. And what's age appropriate and being around a lot of moving equipment is not necessarily age appropriate, and we hear all the time, and we'll hear it again during harvest. You know a child crushed a child falls off and everybody else say you know It's such a tragedy, and and thoughts and prayers. However, the and and that to blame the parents that made that decision. I just want young families, men, and the women to read that way, bringing those toddler age. Those young children out into a busy agricultural setting with a lot of machinery.

**M. Bentley**

Livestock is a huge one with children, too. And I think about even like the more agritourism aspect where you've got these younger livestock with younger kids, and you know they're so cute, and they wanna pet them and they want to kiss on them.

But then there's a whole list of zoonotic diseases that people just sometimes don't even consider.

**K. Thornton**

Including Dog bites!

**M. Bentley**

Yeah, absolutely!

**K. Thornton**

Yeah, what a lot of children don't understand is if you have a heeler and I have a heeler.

They're not necessarily comfortable around young children at all times depending on the individual dog. They're a working dog and They don't they don't behave like a lot of family dogs and children don't realize that.

**M. Bentley**

That is true! Well, Karen, we appreciate you stopping by and chatting with us today. Is there anything else you would like to add before we go?

**16:14 K. Thornton**

Well, I think when the last things I'd like to add, is I've worked with cattle for 40 years and never had come close to any, I mean. I had minor injuries, but nothing major and just a couple of years ago. I almost got taken out by a bull, so it can happen to anyone at any time that lets the guard down.

**M. Bentley**

Check out the links provided in the episode resources section of our website which include safety information on today's topics.

We want to hear from you. Share your stories about health and safety issues on the farm, about injuries that made you change the way you work, or about the ways you keep yourself and others safe on your farm. Also let us know if there's questions you have or topics that you want to hear about on the air. You can visit our website, [gpcah.org](http://gpcah.org) or email us.

Original music for the FarmSafe podcast was written and performed by Ben Schmidt.

This work was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health.

## Episode Resources

- [Ag Safety Extension: Women, Tools and Ergonomics](#)
- [OSU Fact Sheets](#)
- [UCD: Ergonomics](#)
- [Women in Agriculture: Health and Wellness](#)
- [Agrisafe: Healthcare and Women](#)
- [Health Needs of Women in Ag Overlooked](#)
- [Farm Safety and Women](#)
- [Women in Ag: PPE](#)

## Photo

