

Episode Title: Protecting Youth in Agriculture: Inside the 2025 National Action Plan

Topic: National Action Plan

Summary: In this episode, *FarmSafe* sits down with Andrea Swenson, director of the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, to discuss the newly updated 2025 National Action Plan for Childhood Agricultural Safety. Drawing on her upbringing on a Wisconsin dairy farm and years of professional experience, Swenson explains why agriculture can be both an incredible developmental opportunity for youth and one of the most hazardous environments they may encounter. The conversation explores why the national plan was updated for the first time since 2012, reflecting major shifts in agriculture such as automation, artificial intelligence, climate-related extreme weather, labor shortages, and changing farm structures. Swenson outlines the plan’s seven priority areas: leadership, injury and exposure data, public policy, organizational policy, research, dissemination and implementation, and preparedness for emerging threats.

Expert: Andrea Swenson

Episode Quote:

“The second thing that I would say is a great step that folks can do is simply to ask your organizations that you belong to. Ask them what they're doing to safeguard youth in agriculture.”

– Andrea Swenson, director of the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety

Transcript

00:10 E Ritchie

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 first-hand stories and real-life tips for making safer and healthier decisions while on the farm.

00:32 E Ritchie

In this episode, we’re joined by Andrea Swenson, director of the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. With roots on a small dairy farm in central Wisconsin, Swenson brings both personal experience and professional insight to a critical conversation: how we can better protect youth in agriculture while still supporting their passion. We will talk about the 2025 National Action Plan for Childhood Agricultural Safety, a comprehensive road map designed to protect kids on farms.

01:04 E Ritchie

Every day, about 33 children are seriously injured in agriculture, and every three days a child dies. This plan aims to change that by focusing on 7 key areas, including leadership and building strong champions for safety and farming communities, injury, disease and exposure data. Public policy advocating for laws and regulations that protect children. Organizational policy, encouraging farms and Agri businesses to adopt clear safety rules. Research studies that inform practical evidence-based solutions. Dissemination and implementation, making sure safety practices reach every farm family, and finally, emerging threats being prepared for new risks like automation, climate change, and evolving technology, these 7 themes work together toward 1 ultimate goal: ensuring safe participation of youth in agriculture.

02:01 A Swenson

I'm the director of the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. We are part of the National Forest Medicine Center here in Marshfield, WI. I grew up on a small dairy farm about an hour north of where I work right now in central Wisconsin. We had about 40 head of dairy Holsteins, milking and it really inspired me to think about agriculture, I've been involved in agriculture growing up and really my entire life and continuing to think about how do we support the agricultural community and family businesses that really drive home our agricultural [mission].

When we think about agriculture, a lot of different passions come through with youth. I want to be there to support youth and provide that positive developmental space for them to explore that passion, get invested in agriculture and really carry that through in the careers and paths that they may take down the road.

03:05 E Ritchie

Why was 2025 a good time to update this this plan?

03:09 A Swenson

So, the last National Action Plan for Youth Safety and Agriculture was reduced in 2012. Agriculture as we know continues to change and progress and as a center and looking through that plan that we had in 2012 while it was really great and strong. We needed to update that plan to reflect those changes in progress that agriculturists need as an industry. So, we incorporated several new topics into plans, such as automated agricultural production practices, new technologies, changing organizational and public policies, environmental exposures and extreme weather.

Of this National Action Plan also focuses on the need for different groups to work together and collaboratively address some of these persistent issues that were reflected in the last plan and any emerging issues that are reflected in this new plan related to child agricultural health and safety, and many individuals who work to safeguard use in the community. And the plan reflects and highlights this need to bring these individuals, organizations and agencies together to provide support, learn from each other, and engage in evidence and form strategies across the different issues present in the plan.

04:19 E Ritchie

Can you tell us what leadership looks like when it comes to protecting kids on farms?

04:25 A Swenson

So, by establishing a national action plan, what we're doing is creating a road map for individuals and organizations to contribute to collectively and collaboratively achieve goals. That way we're sharing and speaking with one voice and sharing these common messages and strategies to reach youth, those that work with youth, and policy, and collaboratively safeguarding youth. Leadership happens in multiple levels and within multiple different roles, and that's really critical when it comes to protecting youth on farms and that's reflected in the plan.

Anyone can become a leader in their local community or on their farm and encourage these strategies and activities to promote safety for working and non-working youth in agriculture. Likewise, we need leaders in farm organizations and agribusinesses who are willing to be these champions and role models for youth safety in agriculture.

05:20 E Ritchie

We use data to guide decisions and why is that so important and how can farmers use the data to make their kids safer?

05:28 A Swenson

The data helps us all see different patterns in what and why things are happening. So, it's really a helpful resource that we have. In my role, I use data to gain insight into one of the most common hazards for youth on farms and really look at what can we do to address them.

One of the challenges we're facing right now is the lack of a comprehensive surveillance system to track the who, what, where, why, when, how of youth agricultural injuries. So, we work on that and use different models of data systems to address that challenge. We're currently developing a model for health systems to adopt in their research to address youth agricultural injuries in their service areas.

We're also monitoring reports of youth agricultural injuries published in newspapers and media through our Ag Injury News database. This is available at aginjurynews.org and is a freely available resource for anyone to look at what kind of youth injuries and fatalities are being reported in our newspapers and medias. When you think about that, you can really look at it to see what's happening in your local area or community to address those issues and what you can be doing to safeguard that from happening in your farm.

06:46 E Ritchie

What can farms do to adopt organizational safety policies?

06:52 A Swenson

It's a big thing, and there's a lot of information out there. There's a lot of information and resources that are freely available to farms and organizations regarding health and safety practices and really taking that research and data that we have and putting it into practice and evaluating the effectiveness of it.

So, there's these resources and organizations out there that have that mission of driving research and data into practice. So, I encourage farms and workers to go seek those resources out, to have trainings, to take a look at what safety policies and measures you have in place on your farm or in your organization and update those safety policies to reflect current best practices.

Another thing that we can do is be safety role models and really integrate safety into your workplace culture. We are fortunate to have excellent resources throughout the United States that can support these activities. We have local community members such as fire departments, we have extension personnel that can provide support and looking at these safety policies and addressing safety questions. We also have agricultural, health and safety centers such as the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, which focuses specifically on youth and youth-related questions, as well as the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health. They are here to provide support and answer your questions. We all really welcome that opportunity to partner and provide that support where we can and help you and your business and farm be as safe as possible.

08:27 E Ritchie

How are these safety practices reaching farm families? And how do people hear about this?

08:33 A Swenson

The National Action Plan is developed for a wide range of individuals and organizations working within the youth, agriculture, rural, and health and safety spaces. It was developed collaboratively, and it's meant to be used collaboratively. We've had partners including child farm safety organizations, agribusinesses, farm organizations, federal, state, local agencies, educators, researchers, communicators such as journalists, philanthropists and policy makers— all involved and invested in this National Action Plan and child health and safety in agriculture environments. We really want to focus on the need for these different groups to work together and collaboratively address these persistent and emerging issues.

We hope that these groups are able to work together to bring this information into their community and highlight the need to provide support to youth to learn from each other and engage in these evidence-informed strategies to really safeguard youth that are living, working, and visiting farms.

09:41 E Ritchie

With all of this, what kind of policies changes are recommended in the plan?

09:47 A Swenson

The National Action Plan highlights the need to identify and promote policy strategies that provide safeguards for all children working in agriculture. We need to support thorough assessment of different policies and how they may impact farms, farm families and youth workers, and, if needed, update those policies to reflect the current reality of youth and families.

For example, there's been a tremendous amount of growth in agriculture over the years, but some of our policies haven't reflected that change, such as the U.S. Department of Labor's Hazardous Occupation Orders in agriculture. And we want to work and ensure that these different policies and regulations that are currently in place reflect the ongoing need of families and youth as well as advance agriculture.

10:35 E Ritchie

What are the emerging hazards that we should be aware of in 2026 and beyond?

10:42 A Swenson

When we look broadly at the agricultural industry, the same threats that the industry are facing are what youth are going to be facing as well. Things such as extreme weather, anything from wind, and extreme flooding events that have happened, labor shortages, zoonotic disease, vector-borne conditions such as Lyme disease and Alpha-gal syndrome, are all things that youth might be experiencing and especially in 2026. We also have things such as the emergence of AI, autonomous vehicles, robotic equipment that are becoming more popular on farms and that can impact youth health and safety in different ways.

In some ways, they remove hazards that have been present, but they also may be introducing new hazards. And so, we want to work collaboratively to really identify and understand what some of those hazards, both the pros and the cons of integrating these new technologies on to farms.

11:39 E Ritchie

What's one small step that our listeners could take today to align with the plan?

11:45 A Swenson

So, there are many steps individuals can do. I would encourage two small steps that folks could start with today to really improve safety in their organizations. So, one would be just to review your safety policies. Take them out, see what's on the books and assess them for gaps—what has been updated, what hasn't been updated—especially when we're looking at youth. Maybe youth weren't a big part of your business, maybe they've always been part of your business. But is reflected in your safety policies? If you don't have safety policies, it might be a good time to have and start that discussion.

The second thing that I would say is a great step that folks can do is simply to ask your organizations that you belong to. Ask them what they're doing to safeguard youth in agriculture. Our farm organizations are really great at promoting agriculture and future career pathways for youth, and we really hope that safety is embedded in that and it's part of our collaborative approach and working all together to really keep these youth invested in agriculture, see it as a way forward for them in their future careers and keeping them safe and healthy so that they can live out those opportunities.

12:46 A Swenson

Involvement in agriculture can be a positive development and experience for youth. But it is also one of the most hazardous environments youth might be in. By working together towards common goals, we can support youth experiencing the good agriculture has to offer while being safe and healthy.

13:16 E Ritchie

As we wrap up today's conversation, one thing is clear: protecting youth in agriculture isn't the responsibility of just one person, organization, or policy— it's a shared effort. From updating safety practices on individual farms, to strengthening policies, to simply starting conversations within our own communities, every step matters. And as Andrea reminded us, even small actions—like reviewing your safety plans or asking your organization how they support youth safety—can make a meaningful difference. Agriculture offers incredible opportunities for young people to learn, grow, and build a future. But ensuring those opportunities are safe and healthy requires intention, collaboration, and a willingness to adapt as the industry evolves.

14:05 E Ritchie

Listeners can download the full 2025 National Action Plan under the resources for our episode or at marshfieldresearch.org. It's full of practical tools, checklists, and strategies to help you protect the young people who live, work and play on farms.

14:23 E Ritchie

Listen in on the *FarmSafe* podcast to join in on the conversation about keeping safe on the farm.

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, or email us.

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Episode Resources

- [2025 National Action Plan](#)
- **Templates for model Farm Safety Policies** can be found at
 - <https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/articles/a-culture-of-farm-safety-starts-with-a-well-written-policy/>
 - <https://agriculturaljusticeproject.org/toolkit/resources/safety/ajp-safety-plan/>

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