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Levy County FFA students learn farm safety practices



Bronson FFA Advisor Marcia Smith introduces her guest speakers for the event and explains the importance practicing farm safety.

Story and Photos By Terry Witt, Senior Reporter © Sept. 20, 2017 at 10:47 p.m.

BRONSON -- Every three days, a child dies in an agriculture-related incident.

The death rate for children in agriculture was released in 2016 by the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety.

Every day, 33 children are injured in agriculture-related incidents, according to the same fact sheet.

The death and injury rate for children involved in agriculture gave rise to the inaugural Levy FFA Agriculture Safety Day Tuesday (Sept. 20) in Bronson. The event brought about 100 FFA students to the Levy County Extension Office. It will become an annual event.



County Coordinator Wilbur Dean speaks to FFA students about the importance of farm safety. He recalled when his son was accidentally run over by a tractor.

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Harrison Love, farm manager for Rode Ground Covers near Williston speaks to FFA students about the importance of handling farm chemicals safely.



Bronson Fire Department officers educate students about fire safety and the equipment they use for fighting fires.

Students were educated on ways to prevent farm accidents. They were taught the importance of rollover bars on tractors and how to avoid being pulled into a rotating power take-off shaft on a tractor. Rotating PTO's can be deadly.

They were shown farm chemicals and the safety equipment used by licensed professionals

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when applying the chemicals to farm crops. The Bronson Fire Department instructed students on the equipment firefighters use to battle fires or to extract people from wrecked vehicles.

County Coordinator Wilbur Dean was the featured speaker. Students then separated in groups to visit six educational safety stations.

Dean told students the horror he experienced 20 years ago when he accidentally ran over his son with a tractor.

Dean said his younger brother and his son, who was about 7 years old at the time, stopped by one day while he was working in the field on a tractor. They wanted a couple of watermelons. He invited them to climb aboard the tractor. He said that was his first mistake. His father, a farmer, always told him only one person rides on a tractor. That person is the driver.

At some point Dean said his younger brother wanted to get off. He was focused on his brother and didn't know his young son had stepped off the tractor too. The tractor rolled forward pinning the 7-year-old beneath the wheel. Only his head was spared from the crushing weight of the tractor wheel.

Dean said he was horrified when saw his son trapped beneath the tractor wheel. He backed the tractor off his son and rushed the boy to the hospital. His son survived and is healthy today.

"The fear and the realization I had made a mistake by not following the rules; it just takes that one second when you take your eyes off the rules that something happens," Dean said as his voice broke with emotion. "It will bring cold chills when I think about it."

Agriculture professionals today are strongly encouraged to follow safety rules.

Harrison Love, who manages the Rode Ground Covers farm near Williston, told students he doesn't put up with any nonsense when it comes to following safety procedures on the farm.

"If I see you ignoring the safety rules, I'll mail your last check," Love said.

He showed students agriculture chemicals commonly used in farming and the equipment that must be used for the harshest chemicals with red labels and yellow labels. Red label chemicals are for restricted use. Yellow labels are for commercial use. Green labels are chemicals available to the public.

One of the more eye-opening presentations for students at a different station was the tractor safety video. FFA teachers played one video where a stuffed dummy was sucked into a rotating power take off shaft. The dummy instantly became wrapped around the shaft. The unspoken lesson was that the same thing could happen to them if loose clothing became entangled in the shaft.

Marcia Smith, one of the FFA advisors at the event, said she remembers reading about one incident in *Progressive Farmer* in the 1980s where a ninth grade boy was riding on the fender of his Dad's tractor with an agricultural mower attached. At one point the father swept away a tree branch, but the branch recoiled and knocked his son into the mower.

"He was in pieces all over the farm," Smith said.

Smith said she doesn't know how much the young FFA students absorbed at safety day, but she hopes they will remember the lessons learned and avoid mistakes that could lead to injury or death when they are adults.

The 2016 fact sheet concerning childhood agricultural injuries in the U.S. noted that there is no central database on childhood agricultural injuries.

"This fact sheet draws from the best available data," it said.