

## **Farm Safety Depends On Community Support**

It takes a community to ensure farmers and their families stay safe. No one knows this better than a farmer.

Not only do farmers depend on skilled first responders in case of an accident, but they, too, fight fires, rescue neighbors and respond to medical emergencies. These efforts require continual training that can cost thousands of dollars.

“I can’t say enough about the efforts by a variety of groups in our area to keep our farmers safe,” said Bob Read, a Henry equipment dealer and volunteer firefighter. “We rely on the Marshall-Putnam Farm Bureau, COUNTRY Financial, local equipment and grain dealers, and farmers to provide grants and donate rescue equipment.”

To encourage farm safety community partnerships, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS), chose “Safety Counts: Your Community Depends On It” as the theme for National Farm Safety & Health Week, Sept. 18-24.

“Farmers wear many hats. They know and value the importance of having first responders in their communities who are trained to handle farm incidents,” said Sheri Bane, COUNTRY Financial director of commercial agribusiness and product development. “We’ve been providing farm safety grants to county Farm Bureaus for seven years. We were pleased to give \$13,000 to 40 counties last year to help train firefighters and emergency medical technicians.”

As a farmer and Maestown assistant fire chief, Dan Mueller knows the importance of farm safety first-hand. He once helped rescue a farmer from a tractor rollover incident.

“I knew the man, but you block that out of your mind,” said the 22-year firefighter. “You do your job safely to rescue that person without injuring yourself or others. The man did live.”

Scott Etheridge, Princeton Fire Department lieutenant and part-time farmer, noted that a COUNTRY farm safety grant to Bureau County Farm Bureau helped train 50 firefighters and first responders last year.

“Our county Farm Bureau is a huge asset in helping steer us in the right direction. They help us get people involved in safety training who have a vested interest. You have to create local partnerships to make this happen,” said Etheridge, a 15-year firefighting veteran.

Mueller couldn’t agree more. He credited the Monroe County Farm Bureau as the catalyst for building relationships with local grain elevators, seed and chemical dealers, machinery dealers and farmers to train firefighters and first responders.

“We appreciated the COUNTRY safety grant. Without it, we would have had to scale back the number of participants and limited the number of fire departments,” said Mueller. The Monroe and Randolph County Farm Bureaus offered farm rescue and safety training for more than 100 firefighters from 15 fire departments last year.

Etheridge, Read and Mueller noted that costs can exceed \$2,000 for first responder training sessions focused on rescuing farmers trapped in grain bins, tipped-over tractors and machinery entanglement.

Equipment like grain bin rescue tubes, metal cylinders that relieve pressure and prevent grain from completely engulfing a trapped victim, can cost \$5,000. The Marshall-Putnam Farm Bureau recently donated \$1,000 to start a fundraising effort for a grain bin rescue tube. Monroe and Randolph County Farm Bureaus are following suit, raising funds for a rescue tube for each county.

In 2009, 42 percent of people entrapped in grain died, according to the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers. From 1964 to 2005, 74 percent of grain entrapments resulted in death.

The society noted that more people are surviving grain bin incidents due to added emphasis on safer procedures, improved first responder training and grain rescue tubes. First responders can hammer metal panels of the tubes into loose grain around a trapped person. After clasping together the panels, responders scoop out grain until the trapped person can climb free or be pulled out of the grain.

Princeton, Henry and Maeystown firefighters have also become proactive in their efforts to keep local farmers safe. For example, Etheridge said the fire department sponsors public farm safety radio announcements during harvest season. Mueller’s department works with the county Farm Bureaus to put farm safety articles in local newspapers.

“We would be happy if we never used our rescue equipment,” said Etheridge. “Farm safety is paramount to us because we serve farmers and our firefighters are farmers. Farm safety is truly a community effort.”