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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Let's Take the Backache out of Back to School**

By: Jana L. Davidson, Education Content Specialist for the Progressive Agriculture Foundation



As summer comes to an end, many parents have started the preparations to get their children back to school ready. New clothes, shoes and school supplies, including backpacks, are always among the list of must haves. Unfortunately, after the school year kicks-off, backpacks come home most nights packed full and difficult for youngsters to carry. According to the National Safety Council, backpacks that are too heavy can cause a lot of problems for kids, including back pain, shoulder pain and poor posture.

If you've been concerned about the effects that extra weight might have on your child's still-growing body, your instincts are correct! You may have noticed your child struggling to put it on, bending forward while carrying it, or complaining of tingling or numbness. The good news is that there are things you can do to help prevent injury. While it's common these days to see children carrying as much as a quarter of their body weight, the American Chiropractic Association recommends a backpack weigh no more than 10 percent of a child's weight. Here are 6 tips to consider when selecting a backpack:

1. Choose a backpack with an ergonomic design. Although a roomy backpack may seem like a good idea, the more space there is to fill, the more likely your child will fill it. Make sure your child uses both straps when carrying the backpack. Using one strap shifts the weight to one side and causes muscle pain and posture problems.

2. Select the correct size. A backpack should never be wider or longer than your child's torso and never hanging more than 4 inches below the waist.
3. Look for backpacks with padded back and shoulder straps.
4. Hip and chest belts can help transfer some of the weight to the hips and torso and multiple compartments to better distribute the weight. Compression straps on the sides or bottom will help to stabilize the contents.
5. Reflective material on backpacks will help provide extra safety if your child walks to and from school and will help them be seen more clearly.
6. Rolling backpacks should only be used if completely necessary and if your child has physical limitations. Rolling backpacks tend to clutter school corridors, replacing a potential back injury hazard with a tripping hazard.

Back pain impacts both youth and adults. According to Nebraska AgrAbility, 37% to 41% of farmers which include teen workers, report lower back pain. Back pain is also the most common cause of job-related disability. Participants at a Progressive Agriculture Safety Day® learn about these risk factors and that back injury prevention starts at a young age. Since 1995, more than 1.4 million children and adults have been impacted through Progressive Agriculture Safety Day® program. To apply to host a Safety Day or for more information about the program, visit [www.progressiveag.org](http://www.progressiveag.org) or call us toll-free at 888-257-3529.

**Photo:** Progressive Agriculture Safety Day® participants learn to “loosen the load” when it comes to backpacks and other heavy lifting.