Safety on the Farm: Rollover protection structures save lives, says K-State official

Program provides funds for farmers to install safety equipment

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – A Kansas State University official says a program that offers rebates to farmers could help “close the gap” on more Kansans installing safety kits on tractors and other equipment – and more importantly, save lives.

Tawnie Larson, state coordinator of the Rollbars, Rollover Protection Structures Rebate program, said an estimated 30,000 Kansas farms – or, nearly one-half -- have at least one tractor without the available safety features.

Rollbars, Rollover Protective Structures, often known as ROPS, are a piece of equipment that can be used to prevent serious injury or death if a tractor overturns.

According to The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the tractor is the leading cause of death on the farm. Larson said the most frequent cause of tractor-related deaths are side and rear overturns.

“If an operator has a tractor that does not have a ROPS device, they can contact their implement dealer to inquire about the cost and installation of the equipment,” Larson said. “Yet most producers do not seek the after-market equipment.”

Larson said ROPS kits typically cost $1200, but the ROPS Rebate program can provide as much as a 70% rebate to eligible farmers – meaning the actual cost is usually less than $400.
“Awareness and education of the safety features of ROPS and now the possibility of a statewide program that offers rebates to producers may close the gap on more Kansans installing ROPS, and saving lives,” Larson said.

Several states already offer a rebate program for ROPS installation, according to Larson. Kansas, Missouri, and Iowa are currently working with the National ROPS Rebate Program to seek funding to offer this nationally proven program that could make a significant difference in reducing tractor overturns. The program’s goal is to have a ROPS installed on at least one tractor in each operation.

“With tractor rollovers being a significant source of injuries, it just makes sense to install rollover protection on all unprotected tractors,” said Aaron Yoder, research director with the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health.

Larson said it is not the untrained or inexperienced that are overturning the most tractors. Ten percent of operators will overturn a tractor in their lifetime and 80% of rollovers happen to experienced equipment operators. “These rollovers take a toll on rural communities by often taking a valued part of the community away,” she said.

Rollovers are more likely to occur when the tractor is operating on excessive slopes, improper hitching of towed equipment, hitching tow chains or tow straps too high on the rear of the tractor, and excessive speed when turning a tractor.

Older models have a high center of gravity, which makes them unstable -- factors that can result in the driver being thrown from the tractor and crushed under it.

Yoder said tractor rollovers are avoidable. According to the National ROPS Rebate program, ROPS are designed to create a protective zone around the operator when a rollover occurs. The use of ROPS and a seatbelt is estimated to be 99% effective in preventing serious injury in the event of a tractor overturn.

Safety equipment also helps to protect the business; Yoder notes that an estimated 70% of farms go out of business within five years of an overturn fatality; and the direct and indirect cost to a family and farm when a death occurs is more than $775,000.

“This estimate only includes medical, benefits and production costs, and cannot account for the emotional loss of a family member or worker,” Larson said.

More information about the Kansas ROPS Rebate program is available online.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas ROPS Rebate Program, https://bae.k-state.edu/extension/ROPS.html
National ROPS Rebate Program, https://www.ropsr4u.org

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