



KEEPING THE KIDS ALRIGHT

The second Progressive Agriculture Safety Day held at Varna teaches kids the dangers around a farm and what to do to stay safe.

Story and photos by Emily Manns



It may seem like common sense, but even the most experienced farmhand can benefit from going back to the basics of farm safety, let alone children.

Varna, a small community in Bluewater, hosted their second annual Progressive Agriculture Safety Day on July 8 at the Stanley

Top left, a paramedic shows first aid treatment. Above right, kids learn about ATV safety. At left, Pete Rowntree demonstrates the dangers of being caught in a manure spreader. Below, the kids pose for a group photo at the end of the day.



The building was brimming with the excitement of 150 children from all over Huron County, each one sporting a safety day t-shirt while chanting the motto *Think Safety First*.

The co-ordinators, easily identified by their red t-shirts, had spent an entire year preparing for this day, but the hard work was worth it for the potential rewards.

"If we can prevent just one accident, then our day is done," said lead co-ordinator Brenda Chuter.

The children were divided into groups of 17 to 20, each with a different animal name and led by two or three volunteers, most of whom were parents of the kids who were participating.

By 9:00 a.m., all of the groups had made their way to one of nine stations set up around the complex, and then it was time for the fun and education to begin. It was a full morning of learning how to handle work tools, where the danger zones are around a tractor, what to put in an emergency kit, and how to perform first aid on someone who has been injured.

Peter Rowntree, from Hill and Hill Farms, across the road from the Stanley Complex, put on a demonstration with the help of his straw dummy "Farmer John", to illustrate what can happen when you're not careful around an operating manure spread.

Some of the lessons had less to do with farming and more to do with general safety. Like wearing a helmet when riding a bike or how to throw a life preserver, which just shows how much the program has evolved from when it first started 19 years ago.

It all began when the Progressive Agriculture Foundation (PAF) was formed back in 1996, following a flood of public responses to an article published in *The Progressive Farmer* magazine. The article profiled 100 farm fatalities, the majority of which involved young children.

Jack Odle, an editor for the magazine, initiated the first of what was then known as the Farm Safety Day Camp Program in 1995, in the hopes that with the right education, such tragedies could be prevented in the future.

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After a great deal of success in the United States, the program started extending its reach into other regions, gradually making its way to Canada in 2002.

The name of the program was officially changed to Progressive Agriculture Safety Day (PASD) in 2006, and it has continued to grow, including topics that could be applied beyond the boundaries of rural living.

"It's not just about farm safety," said Sandy Miller, a community coordinator for Workplace Safety and Prevention Services (WSPS). "It's about family and community safety."

This is only the second year that the program has been hosted in Varna, and yet there has already been a great deal of positive feedback from both the kids taking part in the activities, and the parents who were volunteering.

"It's a really good event for kids," said Sherry Rollings, a volunteer from London whose two children were participating in the program. "There are so many hazards for kids that they should be aware of."

Although it was designed to engage a younger audience, the program was as much of a learning experience for the adults as it was for the youth.

The Mayor of Bluewater Bill Dowson made an appearance in the afternoon to say grace prior to the volunteers serving up the midday meal. He also came out to last year's safety day, which shows the amount of support the municipality has for the program.

"I'll support it as long as I'm sitting where I am," said Dowson.

At the end of the day, all of the children were gathered together to hear from a young woman who experienced first hand how quickly something that may seem like fun at first can completely change your life.

Darda Geiger, a gold medal paralympic swimmer and currently a member of the Women's National Wheelchair Basketball team, lost her right leg at the age of three after an accident with an operating auger.

Geiger has worn a prosthesis ever since, but that didn't stop her from breaking a world record in the 4x100 medley relay in Sydney and bringing home the gold.

"My story didn't start out too happy, but it ended pretty gold," said Geiger, holding up her Olympic gold medal for everyone to see.

As the safety day came to an end, the energy and excitement the children had brought with them that morning hadn't waned in the least as they shouted out the words *Think Safety First* before picking up their goody bags and heading home with a new appreciation for those simple, yet potentially life saving words.

For anyone interested in holding their own safety day in their community, or just wants to learn more about the program, visit www.progressiveag.org.



Kids learn about tools at one of the stations at the safety day.

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