

Youth Tractor Safety Courses

Introduction

Youth Tractor and Machinery Safety Certification is a program offered through UW-Madison for youth between the ages of 14 and 19, an age group legally protected under child labor or federal workplace and safety and health regulations or those in 4-H or secondary agricultural education programs.

The course is designed to prepare youth to safely operate tractors of 20 horse-power or more. There are additional topics that students may learn throughout the course, including general farm and ranch safety, operating agricultural equipment on public roads and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and utility terrain vehicle (UTV) safety operations.

UW-Madison's certification program curriculum, *Gearing Up for Safety*, was developed by Purdue University, along with leading farm safety experts throughout the U.S.

The requirements for student certification include 24 hours of instructional training, a 70% score for the written exam and passing an in-person driving test. Throughout the course, students will learn a variety of topics including safe operation of 20 horse-power or more tractors, tractor component basics, pre-operational procedures, operation basics and tractor-powered implements.

Students will learn about self-propelled agriculture equipment, operating agricultural equipment on public roads and repairing equipment. Additional topics of discussion include ATV and UTV safety operations as well as skid steer loaders, telehandlers and forklift operations.

Confined spaces in agriculture, grain storage and handling facilities, working with animals and general farm safety hazards are also curriculum discussion topics. First aid and Emergency Response is discussed throughout the course.

Background

During the summer of 2022, the Youth Tractor and Machinery Safety Certification program is being offered in 13 locations throughout Wisconsin by a variety of different instructional institutions including high school agriculture education programs, technical college programs and agriculture focused organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused most course offerings to be canceled in 2020-2021 with limited availability of virtual programs. The 10-year historical trends show a reduction in the number of course offerings and student enrollment across the state; however, with the backlog of students unable to take the course during the past two years due to COVID-19, there is an increase in student enrollment for 2022 but not a similar increase in the number of courses available.

Historically, youth tractor safety courses were taught by the general county extension agent or a high school agriculture instructor. With the shift in the UW Extension model away from county specific agricultural agents and toward multi-county specialist positions, the youth tractor safety course must transition to a new approach.

Currently, the *Gearing Up for Safety* program curriculum is controlled by UW Extension and provided to instructors teaching the course. Course offerings are inconsistent around the state due to the voluntary nature of the instructor and willingness/interest from a local school district or technical college to offer the course.

Most course offerings are taught by high school agricultural or technical college instructors with funding and tuition rates varying between courses. 70% of students enrolled are being taught by a high school agricultural or technical college instructor. Course tuition costs range from \$30 to \$175 across the state with most programs trying to at least cover the program costs.

Most courses are offered between June and July with a weeklong, all-day format. There are a few courses that meet in the evenings or a three-day intensive weekend camp. Very few courses are offered virtually because the format for this course does not lend itself particularly well to a virtual learning format. In select areas of the state that are not being offered an in-person course option, virtual courses may be offered.

The driving and hands-on learning component for agricultural machinery requires at least a portion of the course to be held in person. Procurement of machinery for student learning and driving is left to the course instructor to coordinate. Equipment is generally gathered from sources including farm sponsors, local implement dealers, FFA alumni and technical colleges. Farm Bureau members often are primary contacts for equipment needed for this program.

WFBF Policy

Safety (9): 21 *We support training and safety programs/certification for youth similar to the All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) & Utility-Terrain Vehicle (UTV) Certification and Wisconsin Safe Operation of Tractor and Machinery Certification programs.*

Discussion Questions

- Is there a need for additional Youth Tractor Safety Training classes in Wisconsin?
 - If so, where?
- Is the current, voluntary model for instructors meeting the needs of the agriculture community?
- How can Farm Bureau members support the Youth Tractor Safety Training Certification program?
 - Is there a roll for county Farm Bureaus to sponsor students?
 - How could Farm Bureau members promote the program?
 - Could the county Farm Bureau provide funding to the local school district to pay an instructor?
 - Is there a roll for county Farm Bureaus to offer a course?
 - How can county Farm Bureau members help provide machinery for the in-person driving portion of the course?
 - Are there farmers or implement dealers who would be program sponsors?
- Are there other changes or updates to the program that need to be considered?

Resources

- <https://farms.extension.wisc.edu/programs/youth-tractor-safety/>