

# TOWARDS SWEDISH GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN'S AGRICULTURAL TASKS

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Agriculture is among the most dangerous occupations both for the working population – and for children. In Sweden there are about 3 - 8 fatal injuries among minors in farm environments every year. Many injuries are occurring during actual work or when children are helping their parents with minor jobs. According to Swedish legislation minors has to be provided with appropriate education, instructions and information about health & safety related to his/her work with regard to the minors age and maturity. Today there is no help or support for parents in this situation. We are now starting a process to establish Swedish guidelines for children's agricultural tasks to meet the demands from legislation and to support the farm families with guidelines which may help them to handle this situation.

## INTRODUCTION

Official studies of the risks among the **adult** working population clearly shows that farming is a dangerous occupation. According to the report of the Health Risks Study Group to the Swedish Commission on Working Conditions (1990) female agricultural and livestock workers showed a raised frequency of serious accidents and disorders of the musculoskeletal system. Male agricultural workers had an increased risk of fatal accidents. Within the group as a whole, there is a higher number than average reporting of lung disease, for example asthma and allergic alveolitis. Also the first European Community survey on the work environment (Paoli, 1992) showed that agriculture followed by the building industry and the transport industry are clearly the sectors where, overall, the highest amount of constraints appear. This was reflected in the proportion of workers feeling at risk: 51% in agriculture, 46% in construction and 37,5% in transport. Reviewing literature about accidents and accident prevention in agriculture (Lundqvist & Gustafsson, 1992) shows that occupational accidents in agriculture is a problem all over the world. Farmers, family members (children and teenagers) and farm workers are facing risks; higher than in most other occupations.

A farmers **child** live, play and work at the farm. The farm is full of exciting and stimulating places but there are also situations and areas that are dangerous. This makes the lives of the countryside children different from the life of other children.

## Laws and rules

When the children are under the age of 13 they are (in most cases) only allowed to very light work operations like working in gardens, light feeding jobs, light sowing- and

planting jobs, picking fruits and berries, removing weed and other light work operations on farms run by a member in their own family.

According to Nordic labour legislation, gainful employment is permitted from the age of 16.

There are specific legal restrictions for employees under the age of 18 concerning the type of work, working hours and working conditions pertaining to accident risks and jobs which might be hazardous or impose a heavy strain on the body or cause other harmful effects.

## Statistics

The Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health have a system for collecting information on occupational injuries (known under the abbreviation ISA). The system is based on the work injury insurance form drawn up by the National Social Insurance Board in co-operation with the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health. Employees and self-employed persons in agriculture under the age of 18 reported a total of 62 accidents during 1990-92 (31, 22 and 9 accidents). None of these accidents were fatal. Three of these accidents led to more than three months of absence from work. The injuries were mainly caused by machinery, animals or by falling to a lower level (Elfverson 1995, National Board of Occupational Safety and Health 1994). The material which can be found in Sweden about rural child accidents are often collected from newspaper clips and therefore not sufficient enough. The Swedish Child Environment Council compiles some statistics which shows that there is about 3-5 fatal child accidents each year. It also shows that more than 80 % of these fatal injuries strikes children under the age of 6 years and 75 % of these accidents involved tractors or other machinery (Möller, 1990).

## **Prevention strategies**

Ola Möller - a Swedish student got his inspiration for an exam-paper about prevention of rural child injuries after he had visited a local Swedish Red Cross meeting about child safety.

He made a pre-study as a student (Möller, 1988) and started then to work with his exam-paper (MSc in agronomy), which he finished in 1990 (Möller, 1990). He searched for statistics and made a small international literature survey. His main interest however, focused on how to produce an education material in this subject. He started to make a survey among the safety engineers at Skogs- och lantbrukshälsan (the Swedish Farmers Safety and Preventive Health Association) and asked about their experiences and opinions as advisors to farmers about safety and health. Their opinion was that it is important to continue and to increase the information to both children and adults on the countryside. The result of Möllers work was a very informative education material produced by the Swedish Red Cross (Möller, 1992 a,b). The material "Barn på landet" (Children on the countryside) is now being used together with another book Barnolycksfall / Child accidents (Ericsson et al 1988, 1989) in courses for rural populations by the Swedish Red Cross. According to Pemer (1995), about 300 people have been educated each year in Sweden.

In the community of Falköping in Skaraborg county, a group of 5 women started an idea-group against rural accidents (Holmberg, 1995). They were local representatives of the Swedish Farmers' Safety and Preventive Health Association, the Federation of Swedish Farmers, the Swedish Red Cross and the local health authorities. Their main target group is the children but they hoped to reach results for others as well. They established a plan and started a number of activities around the area, like: rural safety week, information to small children 6-10 years, study-groups about rural child safety, exhibitions, distributing checklists about child safety to all families with children, information through massmedia and so on. This work has now transformed into activities supported by the Swedish Farmers Federation, called FARMAR BUS ([www.lrf.se](http://www.lrf.se))

The Swedish Farmers Safety and Preventive Health Association has been the occupational health care for farmers all over Sweden (Höglund, 1990). When it comes to prevention of rural child injuries have they produced a number of information sheets, checklists, education materials such as slides and over-heads. They were also arranging special meetings about rural child safety and arrange courses in first-aid.

On a modern family farm it is not always easy to have an adult to look after the children. In earlier days, children on farms were looked after by the employees and by their own

families which could consist of several generations. Today, grandparents often lives away from the farm, and all the work is to a large extent carried out by one or both parents. This means that during the busiest periods - sowing and harvesting - it is difficult to keep children amused and to look after them. In many cases children must be left on their own or taken along on tractors and combines. It is during this time that most accidents and near accidents occur. In 1983 the National Child Environment Council and the Federation of Swedish Farmers started to cooperate to arrange temporary child minding during the sowing and harvesting periods. Work was carried out in a project as "harvest day nurseries" and family day nurseries during different periods from April to September (Barnmiljörådet 1987, Backman 1987). At present, State grants are given to all municipalities in the country which are interested in, and arrange for, temporary child minding.

## **TOWARDS GUIDELINES**

According to Swedish legislation - minors (under the age of 18) has to be provided with appropriate education, instructions and information about health & safety related to his/her work with regard to the minors age and maturity. Today there is no help or support for parents in this situation. We are now starting a process to establish Swedish guidelines for children's agricultural tasks to meet the demands from legislation and to support the farm families with guidelines which may help them to handle this situation.

The work will be based on the North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks ([www.nagcat.com](http://www.nagcat.com)), but will be adapted to Swedish legislation, culture and traditions. This work will also be developed in close cooperation with the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety (<http://research.marshfieldclinic.org/children/>).

The guidelines will cover the most common types of work operations in which minors are working with on Swedish farms and the project will use a reference group with professionals in health & safety as well as professionals in child development and farm parents. The guidelines will be available both in print and by a home-page during.

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