

NEDLT Newsletter

Vermont Dairy Farm Safety Effort Going Strong

National Farm Safety Week September 22 – 27

Vermont dairy farmers have always been concerned about safety on their farms and several dairy farmers have taken on extra safety duties to improve the safety on their farm and work toward lower workers compensation premiums.

Twelve Vermont dairy farms took part in the Vermont Farm Safety Pilot Program that concludes at the end of October 2008. The Vermont Farm Safety Pilot Program began in October 2007 and 12 farms are actively involved. This project is an initiative of the Vermont Dairy Task Force in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, the Vermont Department of Labor and UVM Extension. The program's goal is to train farmers to educate their employees on farm safety issues in an effort to reduce injuries and accidents on the farms. Having an active safety program on the farm can result in lower workers' compensation premiums.

Two farms involved in the Vermont Farm Safety Pilot Program approached their workers' compensation insurance carriers upon receipt of their invoice in May 2008. The farms reviewed the situations on their individual farms, the safety program that they have implemented and other relevant information with the insurance carrier. One farm received a discount of 25% off the premium and the second farm received 15% off the premium rate. Both farms saved several **thousand dollars!** Both farms admit that safety was an important part of the discussion around the premium level and the ability to obtain a lower rate. Each farm is unique and there are other considerations but both producers said their carrier did recognize the safety program and it definitely helped them negotiate the discount!

Aaron and Chantale Nadeau of Derby took part in the pilot program. "We have conducted a safety audit with the help of UVM Extension and have worked towards making our farm a safer place for our employees, stated Chantale." We use many of the tools provided to us at our training, like safety posters, DVD training modules and the manual with info-safety tip sheets which I copy and include in our workers paychecks based on what we are doing at that time of year, she added." Aaron and Chantale also applied for a grant to continue their safety work on the farm.

They recently received \$250 from Farm Safety 4 Just Kids' Farm Family Grants. The project gives rural residents funding to make safety improvements to their family farms or conduct safety programs in their communities. Applicants submitted a one-page proposal and an estimated budget to Farm Safety 4 Just Kids. For fourteen years, Successful Farming® magazine has generously funded Farm Safety 4 Just Kids' Farm Family Grants. Funded plans include: purchasing fire extinguishers for tractors, combines, and workshops; installing fencing and shock-absorbing materials like sand and woodchips to create safe play areas for children; and Sterilite cabinets to keep syringes and animal medications away from kids.

The Nadeaus' will use these funds to continue their farm safety program on their farm paying extra attention to the safety of their young children.

All dairy farmers are concerned for the safety and health of their employees and the Vermont Farm Safety Pilot Program addresses these concerns and provides materials and information to make dairy farms safer places to work. Safer environments on dairy farms can translate into smaller increases or lower levels in workers' compensation Insurance premiums due to fewer claims as well as potential discounts on premium levels!

University of Vermont Extension, Vermont Department of Labor and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture have worked cooperatively on this pilot project with dairy farmers in Vermont and will continue the program in 2009. In 2009, dairy farmers will need to apply to take part in this program and the cost will be \$250. A commitment to this program is required from both the dairy farmer and the organizations involved.

Dairy farmers must commit, pay the cost and agree to a farm safety check/audit being done on their farm; to follow through on recommendations for hazard reduction from the audit; identify a farm "Safety Manager" to implement this program in the farm; to develop an individualized "Farm Safety Plan" & implement it; and to conduct monthly on-farm safety training meetings for employees.

If you are interested in taking part in the Vermont Farm Safety Pilot Program for 2009, please contact George Cook with UVM Extension – 802-888-4972 or george.cook@uvm.edu or Diane Bothfeld at the Vermont Agency of Agriculture – 802-828-3835 or diane.bothfeld@state.vt.us.