

# Agritourism – Keeping Passengers Safe on Hay Rides

Fact Sheet FS1145



## Cooperative Extension

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### Introduction

In order to remain economically viable, many farms are taking advantage of the rural and outdoor appeal of the farm and developing entertainment attractions which offer visitors a “farm experience”. There are many agritourism options including corn mazes, hay rides, pumpkin patches and pick your own. A common component of many of these attractions is transporting guests on a hay ride using a tractor and hay wagon. With the potential liability of transporting guests, hay ride safety is an increasingly important issue.

Many of the accidents associated with hay rides could be avoided or eliminated by following simple safety precautions. Without proper control measures in place, you have an accident waiting to happen. Many accidents can be attributed to inadequate supervision or training, poor site and crowd control, or improper vehicle operation. This fact sheet will provide information to help reduce risks and increase the safety of hay rides.

### Before The Hay Ride

#### Route Inspection and Maintenance

The initial planning of the route of the hay ride is very important. Remember these 5 P’s: Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance. Your hayride route should be planned to allow for the most efficient movement of your visitors across the farm, and emphasize any points of interest you may wish to highlight. However, your first and foremost priority is to ensure the safety of your guests.

After determining the route of your hay ride, you should inspect the route with a critical eye looking for potential concerns. For example:

- Identify any hazards or risks that must be addressed or avoided. Concerns can include and are not limited to overhead branches, wires, irrigation heads, sharp turns, uneven ground, and poorly drained soil.
- Avoid on-road travel to the extent possible. This eliminates the need to deal with automobile and truck traffic.
- Consider whether emergency vehicles can access areas of the farm covered by your hayride, should they be needed.

Once the route has been determined the job is not over. A daily pre-ride inspection should be conducted. Check to make sure there are no tire ruts, pot holes, fallen branches or other hazards that could change daily along the route. If needed consider grooming the trail after the day’s use with a York rake or roller. This will help ensure a flat and smooth surface for the hayride.

#### Tractor and Equipment Preparation

Maintaining and selecting the proper tractor for the hayride is critical for safety. When selecting a tractor for the hayride, use a Rollover Protective Structure (ROPS) equipped tractor large enough to handle and stop the load without trouble. Remember your wagon will be filled with guests. The tractor pulling the wagon must have the power, weight, traction and braking ability to control the load.

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A complete service should be performed prior to putting a tractor into service running hayrides. This will help ensure tractors are safe and in good operating condition. Conduct a visual inspection of both the wagon and tractor each time a wagon is hitched to a tractor.

- Check tires, fuel, oil, draw bars, lights, brakes and hitch pins.
- Make sure the wagon has no loose boards, screws or splinters.
- Consider the use of a safety chain connecting the front axle of the wagon to the tractor.
- Make sure all tractors have proper lighting and markers. Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) emblems and appropriate lighting should be provided for both tractors and wagons. Warning lights on tractors can help increase visibility and provide protection from motorists. This is essential if on-road travel is necessary.
- When using a public road use escort vehicles with flashers to lead and follow the hay wagon to warn traffic. All tractors should also be equipped with a fire extinguisher, flashlight, first aid kit, and communication equipment.
- Never use more than one wagon per tractor. The use of multiple wagons can lead to “snaking” which can cause sideswiping or overturning of wagons.

## Training and Communication

Training is essential for all staff involved in the operation of the hayride. All tractor drivers should be trained in the operation of the tractors they will be using. Just because an employee can operate a tractor, does not mean they are a trained and qualified operator for your hayride. Make sure the tractor operator can start and stop smoothly. This is very important when there is a wagon load of people. Passengers can be thrown from the hayride and face serious injury if vehicles stop abruptly or accelerate rapidly. Drivers should be instructed to run the wagons at a slow speed, generally a walking pace. Make sure all drivers know how to brake properly and are familiar with the use of the differential brake lock should they begin to slip. It is a good practice to perform several rehearsal runs under the conditions drivers will be driving (i.e., night time or day time) prior to driving a hayride full of guests.

Training is not only crucial for drivers, but also for the employees who will be responsible for loading, unloading and supervising the hayride. It is suggested that all wagons have a wagon supervisor or tour guide that is adequately trained. It is imperative that all employees know their roles and responsibilities, as well as their expected response during different scenarios. It is also advisable to have several employees who have basic first aid training and fire extinguisher training in the event of an emergency.

Another important part of your safety program is a reliable communication system. It is important that the tractor driver and the wagon supervisor, or tour guide, have effective communication in the event of an emergency such as a flat tire, unruly passenger or other situation that may require the ride to make an unexpected stop. Many well managed

hayrides use two-way radios to communicate. These radios are cost-effective and allow communication between all farm employees. If radio communications are not available, visual communication is essential.

## Crowd Control

Managing customer flow is a crucial component of a well developed safety plan. Crowd control should start by directing customers to your farm, and ultimately to a designated parking area. Once on your farm, it is essential that visitors know where to go and how you want them to move around your property during their visit. Make sure that you have adequate signage leading your customers from your parking area, through your ticket or sales area, and throughout your farm. These signs should be short, simple and clear to understand. In some situations, it may be required that your signage conform to state or local ordinances.\* It is also important to clearly designate areas where you do not want visitors to go. Areas such as chemical sheds, equipment storage, the farm residence, and other areas where a visitor may be injured should be clearly marked and locked if possible.

In addition to signage, consider using rolled barricade fencing to clearly mark the route that visitors should follow when approaching the hayride loading station. This fencing is cost-effective, portable and provides a highly visible barrier. Employees stationed at critical points can also provide directions to assist in customer flow.

## Loading and Unloading

Many hayride accidents can be avoided by having a well organized loading and unloading procedure. To avoid confusion and reduce the risk of accidents or injuries, two clearly designated wagon loading and unloading areas are essential. Having these separate areas not only helps visitors, it also helps staff focus their efforts on either loading or unloading passengers. This also will reduce the risk of visitors coming in contact with moving tractors and wagons.

Loading and unloading areas should be as flat as possible, with a clear field of view to reduce the possibility of passengers jumping in front of moving wagons. The loading and unloading platform should be designed to allow visitors to load and unload quickly, easily, and safely. Employees should be stationed to assist participants when loading and unloading the wagons. Many wagons include built-in steps to aid in loading. Consider the use of a handrail or a designated employee to assist with loading children or individuals with restricted mobility.

Barricade fencing can be used to keep visitors in designated areas while they wait for their turn to ride.

Fresh, dry straw should be used for the hayrides. Straw that has become wet from rain or dew is susceptible to mold and potentially slippery.

Waiting areas should include signs that clearly list the basic safety rules of the ride as well as the minimum age and height requirements to ride alone. These rules should be recited by employees as visitors load the wagon. These rules should be explicitly designed to promote the safety and enjoyment of visitors. Some examples of common rules include:

- No smoking
- No standing while the hayride is moving.
- No lighters
- No camcorders or flash cameras
- No laser pointers
- No food or drink on ride
- No alcohol
- Keep arms and legs in ride at all times
- No horseplay on ride.

## During the Hayride

### Tractor Operation

The safe operation of the tractor during the hayride is of the utmost priority. Drivers should be thoroughly familiar with how to operate the tractor they are using. The tractor operator should take care to start and stop smoothly when people are on the wagon. This is a non-negotiable safety rule that all drivers must follow. Tractor drivers should never allow anyone between the tractor and the wagon while they are moving. This includes never allowing anyone to ride a wagon while standing on the wagon tongue. Tractor operators should drive slowly at all times; full throttle speeds are not necessary. On-road travel should be avoided whenever possible. If on road travel is necessary, escort vehicles with proper safety lighting should lead and follow the wagon. This will provide a warning to vehicular traffic that is traveling at faster speeds than the tractor and wagon. Never allow a tractor operator to take a spontaneous detour. A significant amount of time was invested in selecting the chosen route and insuring that hazards and risks were eliminated from the route. An unplanned route change could place visitors at risk.

*\*Regulations applying to agricultural operations differ greatly among states. It is important that you fully understand what regulations, if any, apply to your proposed operation. Other factors, such as insurance requirements and other liability concerns should be discussed with a reputable insurance provider.*

### Supervision

In order to ensure safety of visitors adult supervisors should be placed on the wagon. The supervisors should enforce the rules of the hayride. The supervisors also serve as a vital communication link to tractor operators. Supervisors should not allow people to climb on waiting tractors. The supervisor should make sure all passengers keep their hands and feet inside the wagon at all times during the hayride. Supervisors should also make certain that all participants remain seated and do not move around or stand during the hayride. Supervisors should also assist with loading and unloading of wagons.

### Conclusion

The addition of a hayride to your agritourism operation can greatly enhance the experience for your customers. By following some simple, common-sense safety guidelines, you can help ensure that your customers have an enjoyable and safe visit to your farm.

### References

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