

Occupations and Workplaces

Farmer

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What does a farmer do?

Farmers, ranchers, crop growers, animal handlers, and other agricultural workers will have similar functions but perform varied tasks depending on the size and type of their farm. They may work with animals, grow various crops, or both. Common tasks include the following:

- Plan and organize the farm's resources.
- Feed and care for animals (both healthy and ill).
- Clean or remove animal waste.
- Work with and maintain equipment such as tractors, pickups, ATVs, front-end loaders, augers, chainsaws, etc.
- Maintain lands, barns, buildings, silos, bins, elevators, yards, fences, etc.
- Monitor water supply systems for animal drinking water.
- Negotiate with potential buyers and arrange for the storage and shipment of livestock or harvest.
- Train and supervise individuals who work on the farm, including family members, workers of all ages, volunteers, and apprentices.

What are some health and safety issues for farmers?

There are many potential health and safety hazards associated with farmer's duties, including:

Biological hazards

- Risk of respiratory disorders, including [lung disorders](#), from inhaling moulds.
- Exposure to zoonotic diseases from various sources, including animals (e.g., [toxoplasmosis](#), [Q fever](#), [rabies](#), [avian influenza](#)), poultry (e.g., [histoplasmosis](#), [psittacosis](#)), insects (e.g., [West Nile virus](#), [Lyme disease](#)), rodents (e.g., [hantavirus](#)), soil, manure, etc.
- [Needlestick](#) or sharps injuries.

Chemical hazards

- Exposure to hazardous products, including fuel, lubricants, antifreeze, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, veterinary preparations, paints, varnishes, etc.
- Exposure to hazardous gases in and around manure pits that may cause asphyxiation and/or explosions.
- Exposure to hazardous gases in silos during grain storage, as well as the risk of engulfment by flowing grain or loose materials such as gravel (see safety hazards and risks in confined spaces).

Ergonomics hazards

- [Standing](#) for long hours.
- Sitting for long hours, especially on moving or [vibrating vehicles](#).
- Working in awkward postures, performing repetitive tasks, and [lifting](#).
- [Fatigue](#) from working long hours or shifts.

Physical hazards

- Exposure to excessive [noise](#).
- Work in [extreme conditions](#), including temperature.
- [UV radiation](#).

Psychological hazards

- [Mental health](#)
- [Stress](#).
- [Working alone](#).
- [General hazards related to mental health](#).

Safety hazards

- [Working at heights](#), such as falls from heights, down shafts, etc.

- [Slips, trips and falls](#) from wet, untidy and obstructed floors.
 - Risks from animals include kicks, bites, steps, strikes, being squeezed against a wall or fence, etc.
 - Various hazards from machinery and equipment (e.g., [tractors](#), pickups, [off-road vehicles](#), ATVs, [front-end loaders](#), [implements](#), [attachments/power take-offs](#), [chainsaws](#), etc.).
 - Risk of accidental start-up when working on equipment or machinery.
 - Working with [sharp blades or edges](#)
 - Working in or near [confined spaces](#)
 - Fire and explosion hazards, including combustible dusts and decaying manure.
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What are some preventive measures for a farmer?

Please use the links provided above for additional information.

Biological hazard

- [Consider vaccination, if available and appropriate \(e.g., rabies vaccine\).](#)
- Regularly disinfect surfaces, objects, and equipment.
- Regularly wash hands with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Do not consume food or drink or smoke in areas where animals are kept.
- Wash and change all clothes and shower after work.
- Be aware of the spread of animal disease and contamination of food and water supplies.

Chemical hazards

- Determine which are hazardous products, follow the safe handling information, and label products properly.
- Be aware of the hazards associated with various materials, including grain storage, manure, hay, chemicals, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, etc.
- Safely use, store, and dispose of chemicals. Train workers in [WHMIS](#) and safe handling of hazardous products.

Ergonomics hazards

- Rotate job functions to prevent overuse injuries.
- Learn safe lifting and manual material handling practices.
- Maintain proper lighting levels in the working areas.

Physical hazards

- Know the hazards associated with confined space entry and follow procedures for confined space work.
- Use mechanical ventilation to control dust and air contamination in enclosed livestock facilities
- Avoid loud noise whenever you can, and wear hearing protection when it's unavoidable.

Psychological hazards

- Seek assistance with stress and other mental health issues.
- Be aware of the impact of fatigue.
- Have a communication plan when you are working alone (e.g., carry a cell phone or two-way radio, always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to come back).

Safety hazards

- Read the manufacturer's instructions and know how to use all equipment safely.
- Inspect all tools and equipment and make sure they are in good condition before use.
- Understand the behaviour of animals including their reactions. Plan, in advance, your escape route whenever you work in an enclosure with animals.
- Know the hazards associated with confined space entry and follow procedures for confined space work.
- Do not enter a storage bin or a confined space, especially those with loose materials, unless all precautions have been taken.
- Make sure all sharp equipment is disposed of in a safe manner.
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., gloves, footwear, hearing protection, respirator).
- Keep and maintain first-aid kit(s).
- Develop an emergency preparedness and response plan, including an animal evacuation plan.

What are some good general safe work practices?

- Follow safety procedures for:
 - Animal handling.
 - [Equipment and tools](#).
 - [Fall protection](#).
 - [Lockout/energy control](#).
 - [Electrical safety](#).
 - [Manual material handling](#).
 - [Good hygiene practices](#).
 - [Confined spaces](#)
 - Practice safe lifting techniques.
 - Practice good housekeeping procedures.
 - Use, maintain and store [personal protective equipment](#) as recommended by the manufacturer.
 - Learn about chemical hazards, [WHMIS](#) and [SDSs](#).
 - Learn how to clean equipment and tools properly.
 - Know basic and emergency [first aid](#).
 - Know how to report hazards to your employer.
 - Follow company safety rules.
 - Know how to [report injury](#) or illness to the employer or workers' compensation board.
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