

In one careless moment

By PHIL JACOBS

AS the pale hues of a pink dawn gave way to a typical, bright summer morning in late June 1958, Ed Allspach, his three brothers and a hired man headed to the field. A gentle breeze had dried the tall grass enough that the work of cutting silage could continue.

The sunlit pastoral setting of furrows and fields and scenic terraced hillsides masked the ever-present danger of running farm machinery and with it, the possibility that this otherwise routine day could end in tragedy. It was just another day on the farm.

The group went about their work as they had always done, confidently, without a hint of trepidation and blissfully unaware of the horrific event that was now just an hour away.

The accident occurred just before lunch.

"We were on the last round of the morning when some heavy grass became lodged in the chopping machine causing

Key Points

- Farmer loses arm in one careless moment.
- Farming is second-deadliest occupation.
- Still too many farmers are injured today.

it to jam," Ed, now 79, recalls. "I got off the tractor, without shutting it off and went to check on the problem. I could see that some of the grass had become tangled in the main belt, so I reached in to get it going."

In the instant of a finger snap, the moving belt suddenly tightened, grabbing Ed's arm. He frantically tried to free him-



self, but his efforts were hopeless. He was yanked into the maw of the machine and propelled down the short canvas bed into the swirling chopping blades.

Hearing his screams, one of his brothers jumped on the tractor and shut it down. The four men worked quickly to free Ed and drove him to a local doctor's office in Mount Pulaski.

"The doctor wasn't geared for that kind of injury," Ed laments. "My arm looked like I had stuck it in the blade of a running lawn mower. He used a belt tourniquet to stop the bleeding, and we rushed to the hospital in Lincoln."

On the way, Ed passed out from the loss of blood. He doesn't remember much of those first days at the hospital, just that it took two surgeries and left him with only a stub near his left shoulder, something he still regrets.

"In most respects, I'm lucky to be alive," he says, "but I've never completely gotten over the utter disgust of that careless moment. I've been able to do a lot, but there have been many things I cannot do, and that bothers me from time to time."

Ed did not let the loss of his left arm keep him from farming. At the time of the accident, he and his wife, Shirley, had six children to nurture and 3,000 acres to farm.

Fortunately, Ed's brothers and a hired man were able to take care of the farming while Ed spent four weeks in rehabilitation learning how to manipulate his new prosthesis. He's



LIVING WITH INJURY: Ed Allspach lost his arm in 1958 when he carelessly tried to unplug a forage chopper.

worn out five of them over the years.

Fate struck again

As Ed recovered and the children grew up, fate would visit Ed and Shirley yet again with an even greater adversity: the death of their youngest son, David. Eighteen-year-old David was working on a metal grain bin they were expanding. Ed had purchased a new electric impact wrench that David was using to tighten bolts when it suddenly shorted out and electrocuted him.

Jacobs writes from Pana.

Inside Illinois Ag Briefs

Basket Fest 2008

John Deere is partnering with The Longaberger Co. to present Longaberger Basket Festival 2008, a four-day family event on the John Deere Commons in downtown Moline. In addition to interactive ag displays, the John Deere Pavilion and John Deere Collectors Center will house basketmaking stations where guests can handcraft their very own commemorative basket. The festival runs from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., May 15-18. For more information, visit www.johndeereattractions.com or call 740-322-5588.

Battling soy allergies

Two University of Illinois studies show that fermenting soy dramatically reduces its potential allergenicity and also increases the number of essential amino acids in soy products, making them a healthy and a safe choice for consumers. "When we fermented soy seeds, flour or meal by introducing certain microorganisms, immunoreactivity was significantly reduced — by as much as 99%. This shows that we have the potential of developing nutritious, hypoallergenic soy products," says Elvira de Mejia, a U of I associate professor of food science and human nutrition. De Mejia notes that fermentation had also improved the essential amino acid composition in the soy products and produced new peptides that may be beneficial.

Second-deadliest occupation

THE stories on this page illustrate only two types of accidents that kill and maim farmers and their children each year. "Farming is the second-deadliest occupation in the U.S. after mining," notes Bob Aherin, University of Illinois professor of ag safety. "And although the numbers are much better today, we still have a long way to go."

The death rate among farmers increased from 50 per 100,000 in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to a peak of 70 deaths per 100,000 in 1965, according to Aherin. Since then, the rate of farm deaths has fallen to 22 per 100,000 and remained fairly steady. "Besides the roughly 780 deaths last year, most recent statistics indicate more than 100,000 farmers were injured last year, some so severely they had to give up farming."

Safety progress slow

WE never thought much about safety in the old days," says Clarence Schmitz, 80, who has farmed all his life near Oconee. He went to the

field at age 10, driving a team of horses and a harrow.

"When I was a kid, safety was something we just never talked about, even though we heard stories from time to

time about all the accidents in the area, some of which were pretty bad.

"For example," says Schmitz, "one of our neighbors fell into a combine and another got his clothes caught in a corn picker. And I had an uncle that lost four fingers to a corn shredder."

Fortunately all of them lived.

"The man who fell into the combine was able to crawl out, and the man who got too close to the corn picker lost his clothes to the machine, but he, too, survived," Schmitz remembers. "Sometime after machines finally relegated most of

the horses and mules to pastures, farmers slowly began thinking more seriously about the growing number of accidents and deaths, and what they might do to correct some of the problems."

Progress was slow but steady. It took legal action and a lot of safety programs to slow the rate of death and injury on the farm.

"People began filing lawsuits against the farm machinery manufacturers, seeking huge settlements," continues Schmitz. "Suddenly the various manufacturing companies began adding more safety features to their machines."

"About the same time, farm organizations began offering safety classes. Those two initiatives have undoubtedly saved many lives and a lot of injuries, but there are still too many farmers being killed and seriously injured," he believes.



CLOSE CALLS: Clarence Schmitz remembers many farm accidents from his lifetime of farming that could have been worse.