

Safe Play Areas

Children are curious and see the farm as a gigantic playground. They may not recognize or understand dangers and may forget the rules laid out for them. It is important to have areas on a farm where it is safe for a child to play – and items in the play area that will keep children interested and engaged so that they want to play in these areas.

Play is a child's way of learning and growing. A safe play area, when carefully designed, is an environment that will stimulate the physical, emotional, social and intellectual aspects of a child's development. It should be furnished with play equipment and play opportunities to enhance muscle growth and coordination, while providing opportunities for play.

Farm worksites – it is important for parents to understand that working areas on farms and ranches can be unsafe areas for young children. Farm work areas often contain lots equipment with moving parts, blind spots and sharp components, animals and other items dangerous to young children.

Alternatives – choose alternatives to taking young children into farm work areas and on farm equipment. Not only does this endanger young children, it also distracts parents/adults from their work. Options for keeping young children out of farm worksites include safe play areas, off farm child care and/or having a trusted family member or adult watch the children (outside of the farm work areas).

Location – think about where children are currently playing on your farm. Is it a safe area? Consider farm traffic, noise, dust, chemicals and other potential hazards when deciding where to locate a play area.

Cost – play items in a safe play area do not have to be expensive. They can include non-manufactured playground items, such as objects found around the farm and from the natural environment.

Child development – consider child development when choosing items for play areas. Adding play items and activities to your play area that match up with your child's age and developmental level will keep them engaged and more likely to remain in play areas.

Barriers – ensure all play areas on farms have adequate barriers to keep children from accidentally running into farm traffic areas or worksites. Barriers should be constructed so that children cannot climb over, under or through them.

Ground cover – it is inevitable that children will fall when playing, so it is important to have adequate ground cover to protect them. Wood chips, sand, shredded or recycled rubber, and poured rubber surfacing are examples of good types of ground cover. The amount and depth of ground cover needed will depend on the type and height of play equipment.

Plants and trees – plants are an essential part of a play area and should be included. Plants and trees can be nurtured, climbed on, played with, used for hide and seek and treasure hunt games. Trees can also provide shade, which is an important feature in play areas. Avoid plants and trees that are poisonous or toxic.

Maintain – before and after every use, walk through play areas ensuring that all garbage and debris are picked up and that all equipment and play structures are intact and working.

Remember – play structures and plants in a play area are for children's use and don't have to be aesthetically pleasing. Plants or trees may be trampled on or damaged by children, and play items that children really enjoy aren't always "shiny and new".

More detailed information on creating safe play areas is available at cultivatesafety.org/play

