

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, November 4, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST ONLY)

Subject: "AGRICULTURAL ACCIDENTS." Information from Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Homemakers, I bring you something rather serious to think over, today. At first glance, you will say, possibly, that the subject is one for the men folks; that there's nothing the homemaker can do about it. But aside from the household activities that every woman needs to check up on once in a while, I'm a firm believer in woman's function as "the power behind the throne." I think women are naturally observant, and that they can point out what they notice, and if it needs correcting, they can get something done about it.

A good many of you, I have no doubt, have congratulated yourselves on keeping the family safe right on the farm. You've thought of city occupations as somewhat dangerous to life and limb, especially in industrial centers where people have to work with machinery in mills and factories, or on high buildings in construction work, or in heavy traffic if they drive trucks, busses, street cars, and so on.

Well, homemakers, I've just received a copy of a talk given by Dr. David J. Price, engineer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which he presented as chairman of the Agricultural Safety Section at the 26th National Safety Congress on October 15th. And, believe it or not, Dr. Price says that fatal agricultural accidents outnumber those in any other occupation. Let me repeat that astounding information: Fatal agricultural accidents outnumber those in any other occupation. The American Red Cross is the authority Dr. Price quotes to prove this.

"During 1936," the Red Cross states, "fatal work accidents in agriculture numbered 4500, compared with only 2300 in manufacturing and 2800 in construction activities. Trade and service industries had the next highest total of fatal accidents to agriculture -- 4200; and transportation and public utilities, 2500. Mining, quarrring, oil and gas wells accounted for 1700 fatal accidents."

In general classification of all occupations by the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of persons engaged in farming is second in order. The annual accident death rate per hundred thousand workers for all occupations, including agriculture is 32.8, but for agriculture alone, the rate is 42 per hundred thousand workers.

The State of Kansas has been outstanding in giving direct attention to the farm accident problem. A seven-year study of fatal farm accidents was completed in 1936. This study showed that 50 percent of all the deaths in industry occurred in agriculture. Over 6 percent of all accidental deaths in the State resulted from farm work.

Are we to conclude then that it is less hazardous to rivet girders on a skyscraper or work on a bridge or operate a machine in a factory than to stay on a farm and till the soil or raise livestock? The answer is yes, so long as rural people do not take sufficient precautions to protect themselves from known dangers and hazards around the farm.

Kansas investigators found that machinery caused 29 percent of the accidental deaths occurring in farm work in that State. This may have been due to carelessness in handling or operating the machinery, to lack of proper safeguards for moving parts, to inferior materials, or to lack of training in the use of powerful combines or machines with revolving saws or knives. The statistics tell only how many lost their lives. A large number received severe injuries.

Twenty percent of the fatal farm accidents reported by Kansas were caused by animals. Farmers were gored by bulls, kicked by horses and mules, infected by diseased animals. Working in excessive heat caused sunstrokes, or heat prostrations, which accounted for 12 percent of all the fatal work accidents. Accidents due to automobiles, trucks, wagons, or other vehicles increased the total by another 8 percent. Falls were responsible for 9 percent of the accidental deaths. Five percent more were caused by lightning. Seventeen percent were due to miscellaneous causes.

Dr. Price, in his address, also referred to cases of suffocation by silo gas. If you don't think such an accident concerns a homemaker, listen to this: "A recent accident of this type occurred on a Maryland farm in September, 1936, when a mother and nineteen-year-old daughter lost their lives in attempting to rescue a nine-year-old child, who had been overcome by the gases present in a pit silo.....A study of silo gas accidents shows that in the gases present there is a depletion of oxygen and an increase of carbon dioxide. The Chemical Engineering Research Division of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils has available published recommendations and procedure for the prevention of silo gas accidents. This can be secured upon request."

Loss of fire is an ever present danger in rural districts, one which I have discussed in these talks many times. Dr. Price states that at least 3500 lives are lost each year as the result of fires on American farms--about ten every day. Dr. Price concludes his paper with a reference to the New London, Texas school explosion, and says:

"Although farm and home accidents outnumber all other accidents, their prevention has not, up to the present time, received the attention given to construction, manufacturing, and similar lines of accident prevention."

Homemakers, let's be on the alert to stop some of this unnecessary and heart-breaking waste and suffering. Let's ask regularly about the safe operation of the farm machines. Let's suggest that the new farm helpers be carefully trained before they have dangerous tools or machines entrusted to them; let's urge care in handling work animals, and notice for ourselves how carefully the difficult ones are stabled or tethered. Let's urge wearing protective headgear when working in the glaring sunshine, or a long noon pause during the hottest part of the day. And let's be firm with the boys and girls and all who drive the moter vehicles, to insist on safe driving, thorough inspection and prompt repair. As for falls, let's do away with shaky ladders, roof work without safeguards, and take all other precautions that suit the tasks.

"Better be safe than sorry," was always a good motto. Let's apply it around the farm.

