

Tech solution helping farmers stay connected to protect their best asset – their people

by The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

Plenty of farmers have stories about times when things went awry while working alone. Machinery broke down in a field. A ladder fell and left them stranded up high. But when those situations become emergencies, getting help in a timely manner is imperative for avoiding a devastating outcome.

According to the latest [Canadian Agriculture Injury Reporting](#) data, between 1990 and 2020, there were 2,814 agriculture-related fatalities in Canada, an average of 91 deaths each year. And while the data provides some good news by noting that the “overall agriculture fatality rate experienced a statistically significant” decrease during the three-decade period, the report makes it clear that more still needs to be done to enhance safety on Canadian farms.

Looking to help farmers protect their best asset – their people – is what Connected Worker Solutions from Decisive Farming by TELUS Agriculture is aiming to do, by providing real-time monitoring services for worker activity and location.

Tyson Ormann runs a mixed farming operation near Foremost, Alberta and began using Connected Worker tools in the spring of 2021. For Ormann, who farms alongside his father and two other full-time workers, having tools to support his employees when they are working alone is an invaluable advantage.

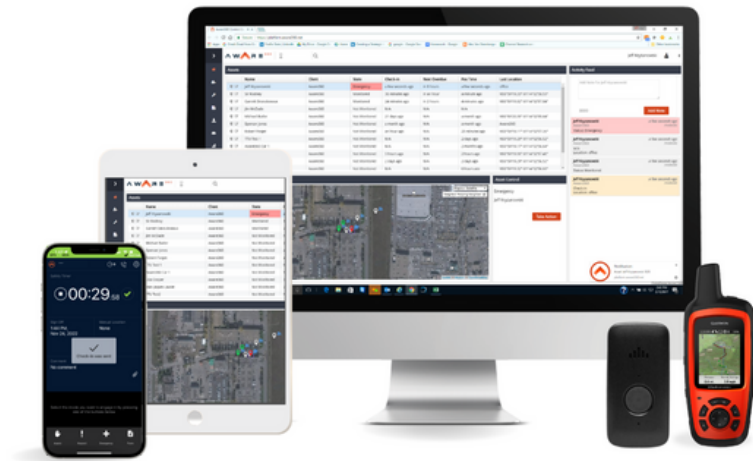
“I always tell my guys to check in periodically so we’ve always been fairly safety conscious. About 95 per cent of the time, we know where everyone is on our farm because we don’t have a lot of employees, but [the Connected Worker products] give that extra peace of mind,” explains Ormann. “At the end of the day, you can never be too safe.”

TELUS Connected Worker solutions offer various tools, including a smartphone app, a wearable SOS device and a satellite device for areas with limited cellular service.

Among the features on the devices is a check-in option, as well as a hazard timer, which offers an extra layer of protection for a worker in a particularly hazardous situation, as well as the ability to create a virtual geo-fence and real-time broadcasting.

Plus, each Connected Worker device is backed by a 24/7 monitoring service to ensure farmers and farm workers get the help they need as quickly as possible.

“When thinking about safety, it should be ‘How can I reduce the probability and the impact?’ And that’s what this does. Our products can’t guarantee you won’t have incidents, but they are designed to reduce the probability and the impact of those incidents,” says Christiane Deschenes, a senior product manager with TELUS.



One of the Connected Worker devices that Ormann uses is the SOS wearable, a button device using cellular data that can be worn around the neck or clipped on a belt or hat. In addition to two-way communication, the device has fall detection capabilities and will automatically initiate a farm’s contact escalation plan if it detects a sudden drop.

“It’s simple to use, so you really can’t go wrong,” says Ormann of the wearable device. “We’re starting to do more things with bigger machinery and working alone more, so there’s nothing wrong with a little extra protection. It certainly doesn’t hurt to have. It works for us and would probably be even more useful for an operation with 10, 15, 20 or more workers who are spread out all over the place.”

Ormann’s operation is like many farms in Canada that employ both family members and external workers in locations with limited connectivity. To address the need for more connectivity, TELUS has partnered with government-funding bodies to bridge the digital divide and connect every underserved community in Canada to high-speed internet by 2030 – a target committed to by

the Government of Canada. Ormann and his employees use the pocket-size satellite-enable device, which he says “does the trick” when there’s minimal or no cell service.

Susan Cooley-Pottier, a senior product manager with TELUS, says that regardless of the device used, when farmers and farm workers need help it just takes the press of a button to alert the monitoring centre, which will activate the contact escalation path that each farm defines. For example, that could involve contacting the farm manager, then a colleague, and then emergency services.

“Our tools don’t require someone to be behind a desk watching their employees in order to be effective, especially since that’s not realistically going to happen on a farm,” says Cooley-Pottier. “If you’re a farm manager and you go on vacation, your employees can still use the tools and be protected without you there.”

When it comes to introducing new safety practices and procedures, questions are often raised about the return on investment associated with safety. But while investing in safety undoubtedly comes with upfront costs, Cooley-Pottier and Deschenes explain that it inevitably offers long-term rewards with increased efficiency and less time lost due to preventable incidents.

“When farmers ask what the return on investment is on this, it’s you. You are the ROI. You are your farm’s greatest asset and you can’t be replaced,” explains Cooley-Pottier, stressing that investing in people should be no different than investing in farm machinery. “It’s similar to life insurance in the sense that when you need it, it’s there, but hopefully you don’t need it.”

And for those interested in the monetary return on investment in safety, Deschenes adds, “Our research indicates that for every dollar invested [in safety], employers save between \$4 and \$6 in return. There are a lot of different factors at play with workplace safety.”



Cooley-Pottier notes that the devices are designed to be easy to use so they can be effortlessly integrated into a farmer's everyday routine in order to complement rather than disrupt existing processes and procedures. After all, she adds, the premise behind the Connected Workers solutions is one that everyone can agree on: better protection for farmers and farm workers.

"We know we're asking farmers to think about safety in a different way. And we know farmers are incredibly self-sufficient," she says. "We're not trying to change how farmers work; we just want to help them add something to how they work so they can be a little safer.

"The end goal for us is that we want farmers to come home to their families – that's what this is really all about."

To learn more about the Connected Worker solutions from Decisive Farming by TELUS Agriculture, visit decisivefarming.com/safety.

For more than a decade, CASA has been raising awareness about the importance of safety on Canadian farms through Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, which takes place every year during the third week of March. In 2023, CASW is presented in partnership with key partners Farm Credit Canada and Decisive Farming by TELUS Agriculture. Other sponsors include CN, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Syngenta, and Fertilizer Canada.



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