Tips for Safe Tractor Operation

A tractor can reduce time and labor costs to complete tasks on a fruit and vegetable farm. A small, four-wheel drive (4WD) tractor (25 to 55 hp) works well for the small-scale grower. Keep in mind that certain implements — particularly those driven by a power takeoff, or PTO — require a minimum horsepower to operate. Accidents happen when equipment fails or people make mistakes.

Follow these tips for safe tractor operation:

- Avoid injuries by not placing your body in harm’s way at any time. Stay clear of the PTO shaft. Do not wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Always wear eye and ear protection.
- Never place your body between the tractor and an implement when attaching the three-point or pull-type hitch.
- When attaching implements, low tractor speed and good hand-signal communication between the operator and the helper are critical to safety.
- Be extremely careful to avoid pinched fingers and toes when attaching implements. Wear boots when operating equipment.
- Drive up and down hills. Do NOT drive across a slope to avoid a rollover.
- If operating on hilly or sloped land, use a tractor with a roll bar.
- Do not turn at high speeds, especially when using a front-end loader.
- Always wear your seat belt. If a tractor rolls over, it will save your life.
- When using a front-loader or forklift, keep the cargo as low to the ground as possible. Be careful when turning the tractor to avoid tipping over.
- Check engine oil and fuel before use. NEVER let a diesel tractor run out of fuel. The injector pump on a diesel engine needs to be primed, which can be difficult to do.
- Transport equipment with caution. Chains and an appropriate trailer that passes legal inspection are essential for safe transport.
- Never operate a piece of machinery while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

To learn more about tractor safety, see HOSTA Tractor Safety Training (MF2671) and Tractor Safety for the Landscaping and Horticultural Services Industry (MF2708), which is also available in Spanish (MF2708S).
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