

Ag equipment and minors

Operating ag equipment: Minimum age requirements

The U.S. Department of Labor prioritizes safe work for young people through provisions outlined in [Child Labor Bulletin No. 102](#). Employers should be aware of minimum age requirements for operating agricultural equipment.

Minimum age standards for agricultural employment:

- **At least 16 years of age:** Minors who are at least 16 years old can perform any farm job, including agricultural occupations declared hazardous by the Secretary of Labor. This includes work during school hours.
- **Between 14 and 15 years of age:** These minors can be employed outside of school hours in any agricultural occupation except those declared hazardous by the Secretary of Labor.
- **Between 12 and 13 years of age:** They may work outside of school hours with written parental consent or on a farm where the minor's parent or a person standing in place of the parents is also employed.
- **At least 12 years of age:** Generally, this is the minimum age for employment in agriculture, although there are a few exceptions.

Hazardous agricultural occupations (HO/As):

Minors under 16 may not work in occupations declared hazardous by the Secretary of Labor:

1. Operating tractors over 20 power-take-off (PTO) horsepower or connecting/disconnecting implements
2. Operating or assisting to operate specific machines (e.g. grain combine, corn picker, cotton picker, hay baler)
3. Operating or assisting to operate other types of machines (e.g. trencher, forklift, power-driven circular saw)
4. Working with livestock for breeding or newborn care
5. Working with timber with butt diameter of more than 6 inches
6. Working from a ladder or scaffold at a height of over 20 feet
7. Driving a vehicle to transport passengers or riding a tractor as a passenger or helper
8. Working inside confined spaces or hazardous environments (e.g. upright silo, manure pit)
9. Handling or applying toxic agricultural chemicals
10. Handling or using blasting agents
11. Transporting, transferring or applying anhydrous ammonia

For further guidance, refer to the Department of Labor Child Labor Bulletin No. 102 ([dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/childlabor102.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/childlabor102.pdf)).

Exemptions

The prohibition of employment in hazardous occupations does not apply to youths employed on farms owned or operated by their parent or legal guardian. In addition, occupational tasks 1 and 2 may be performed by a youth age 14-15 years if:

- They are a student learner enrolled in a vocational agricultural program; or
- They have a certificate of completion of training under a 4-H or vocational agriculture training program. Note—Employers should retain a copy of the certificate.

Penalties for violation

Violating child labor laws is a federal crime. Offenders may face fines or jail time if proven guilty. Recent cases highlight farmers serving jail sentences for illegally hiring underage youth for hazardous tasks. To avoid penalties, farm and agribusiness owners should diligently comply with state and federal child safety laws.



For assistance with risk management services or safety resources, contact us at RMSolutions@nationwide.com or 1-800-260-1356.

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