

## LABOR RULES PROPOSE TOUGH CHANGES IN FARM WORK FOR CHILDREN



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has released data that more than 15,000 youth, under the age of 20, were injured in farms, in accidents on all-terrain vehicles, horse and tractors and whilst performing regular farm chores. Spurred by this data, Nancy Leppink, Deputy Administrator of the Labor Department's Wage and Hour Division, is of the opinion, that changes must be made to the rules that remain virtually unchanged, over the last 40 years, when they were first crafted. The US Department of Labor has proposed a set of rules that spell out the type of jobs young kids can do on the farm and the jobs that they cannot. Whilst farmers and farm owners feel that this could disrupt the rural way of living and dissuade youngsters from taking to the farm and pursuing careers in farming and agriculture, they confess that safety is a paramount concern. However, the Labor department is saying that they are exploring possible exemptions that can be given to parents, to assign "tasks and chores to their children on farms and of relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles." Probably under the assumption, that parents will not take undue risks with their own children and not compromise on their safety. The proposed changes would prohibit children under than 16 from using power driven equipment. Under-18 children would not be permitted to work at grain elevators, silos, feedlots and livestock auctions and from transporting raw farm materials. Children will be strictly stopped from working on tobacco farms. Health hazard areas like manure pits and pesticides will also be out-of-bounds for the kids. Similar legislation has been proposed in other farming areas as well. Arnie Johnsrud, the agriculture instructor and FFA adviser at Kewaunee High School, has expressed anxiety, that already fewer and fewer young people are getting involved in farming and agriculture, "If you take this out, that's that many less we'll have directly connected to agriculture." "If kids don't get any experience working on some of these farms, they might not find a niche or something they value. You have to give them that opportunity." Barbara Marlena, a research scientist with the National Farm Medicine Center, said stronger child safety regulations are long overdue, especially for such a dangerous industry. "Youths who work in other industries — the child labor laws are much stricter." It is feared that whilst the new laws were formulated in an effort to protect children from potentially dangerous and unsafe situations in the farm, it could also prevent youngsters from working on the farm and participating in the learning process. The new laws have not yet come in force and the department of labor has provisionally shelved its legislation that could erode and eat into tradition of children working on family-owned farms and also inhibit new entrant into this important area of America's economy.