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Spreading Safety Inside the Farmgate

Harborview Farms is the first in the nation to earn ResponsibleAg certification.

During the height of the 2016 harvest season, Trey Hill's phone rang with devastating news. One of his employees had been injured.

"He'd been walking on top of a U-trough grain auger. The auger's cover wasn't fully secured, and his leg was caught," says Hill, owner and manager of Harborview Farms in Rock Hall, Maryland. "We were really lucky. He escaped serious injury, but he easily could have died."

In the accident's aftermath, Hill learned that several employees knew the auger cover had been loose for some time. Yet no one had spoken up about the potentially dangerous situation, and no procedures were in place to identify such a hazard.

"It was a huge wake-up call. At that point, we realized workplace safety wasn't a priority in the farm's culture," says the fourth-generation farmer. "We had to change."

In the nearly four years since that accident, Harborview Farms has completely embraced a new attitude toward safety. In addition to implementing a safety training program for employees, Hill signed on to the ResponsibleAg program. The result? Harborview Farms is the first farming operation in the United States to become ResponsibleAg certified.

Applicable Across Agriculture

When ResponsibleAg launched in 2014, the intent of the industry-led initiative was to help agribusinesses ensure compliance with environmental, health and safety (EHS) and security regulations to keep employees, customers and communities safe. However, the program's resources, approach to facility evaluation and recommendations for improvements are also relevant for farms.

Hill says his family's farm is not unlike a small agribusiness. Within the operation, he and his employees handle seed, fertilizer, crop-protection products and grain. They have on-farm diesel and propane tanks, as well as many pieces of equipment.

"We farm roughly 13,000 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat across three counties here in Maryland adjacent to Chesapeake Bay," Hill says. "We have two grain facilities and 14 employees. We do everything in-house."

After the auger accident, Hill began searching for a safety solution. "It was difficult to find a one-stop shop for everything," he admits. "Some companies would help with their portion of the industry, but it was piecemeal."



TREY HILL
Owner and Manager,
Harborview Farms



Thanks to the ResponsibleAg program, a new culture of safety has developed among the employees at Harborview Farms.

One of Hill's suppliers, Willard Agri-Service in Worton, Maryland, a certified ResponsibleAg location, suggested the Asmark Institute as a safety provider.

"We signed on for Asmark's full safety program," Hill says. "We have monthly safety meetings, even during our busy times. Everyone is first aid and CPR certified. One employee is certified for spill cleanups, and two others are trained in grain bin extraction."

Soon after joining the Asmark program, Hill began hearing about ResponsibleAg. He says attaining certification was a natural step in the farm's safety progression.

"It's been another giant leap in workplace safety," Hill adds.

Exemptions Don't Lower Expectations

Often, farms are exempted from rules that apply to other industries — even when their activities are similar. However, when an incident occurs, those exemptions don't necessarily reduce liability.

"If a grain truck accident happens, a jury doesn't care that you were exempt from this rule or that rule. They care if you were overweight," Hill says. "If your propane tank explodes and kills five people, no one is going to care that you were exempt. You're better off adhering to the rules."

"Before, I'd say we were typical of most farms. I wouldn't say we were unsafe or careless. We were just unaware."

— Trey Hill

ResponsibleAg provided Harborview with a safety roadmap. Through the auditing process, the farm improved environmental protections around fuel tanks and brought propane and

electrical systems up to code. Hill created emergency plans for the local fire department, instituted a "Lockout/Tagout" program and increased signage and labeling.

"Before, I'd say we were typical of most farms," he says. "I wouldn't say we were unsafe or careless. We were just unaware."

Hill says while ResponsibleAg checklists are focused on an agribusiness audience, the applicability to farms like Harborview is evident.

"There is no way to research everything that ResponsibleAg encompasses," he says. "It's so comprehensive. There aren't many stones unturned. We just kept working down the checklist until we eventually got it all done."

Harborview Farms has reaped a number of benefits from ResponsibleAg, both intrinsic and altruistic.

"We recently had our insurance requoted, and our rates are down," Hill says. "Our team also sees what we're doing, and it's really conveyed our appreciation for them and concern for their safety."

"Our whole culture has changed," he adds. "As a farmer, I'm glad we joined ResponsibleAg, and I'd encourage others to do it, too. I sleep much better at night, knowing that no matter what we're working on, people feel safe doing it. Safety is the main thing."

To learn more about ResponsibleAg, visit www.ResponsibleAg.com or call 270.683.6777.



Harborview Farms in Rock Hall, Maryland, manages roughly 13,000 acres adjacent to Chesapeake Bay. In 2019, it became the first farming operation in the United States to become ResponsibleAg certified.

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ResponsibleAg is an industry-led initiative **committed** to helping agribusinesses properly store and handle farm input supplies. The program helps members ensure they are **compliant** with environmental, health, safety and security regulations to keep employees, customers and our communities **safe**.

