



Skid Steer Safety for Farming

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This publication is intended to provide a general overview of safety considerations when using skid steers on farms. It highlights some common safety considerations but is not all-inclusive and should not be considered as a substitute for your machine's owner's manual. Always read and follow the owner's manual for your machine.

Introduction

Compact skid steer loaders are a choice machine for many farmers. Their small size, quick turning ability, and load-bearing capacity make for a valuable piece of farm equipment for small to large operations. Knowing basic safety and maintenance skills is critical to skid steer ownership and operation.

Know Your Machine

Upon acquiring your skid steer and operating it for the first time, consult your owner's manual and familiarize yourself with operational controls.

Skid steer loaders operate with joysticks as opposed to a steering wheel. For inexperienced operators, this is a change compared to the operation of a tractor or pickup truck. Joystick settings and sensitivity can be adjusted to the preference of the operator either by the dealer at time of purchase or by consulting the owner's manual.

Hazards

Balance is a critical piece to skid steer operation. Two-thirds of a skid steer's weight is in the rear of the vehicle when the bucket is empty. Overloading the bucket can make the skid steer excessively front-heavy. Attempting to operate the vehicle outside the cab can result in crushing or pinning the operator if the wrong function is engaged or without engaging lift arm supports in the event of an emergency. Operating on steep terrain, hauling unbalanced loads, and making sharp turns at high speeds can cause overturns.

Safety Features

Each skid steer is equipped with several safety features (figure 1). **Lift arm supports** are recommended by the manufacturer when an operator needs to work around or travel while the **lift arm** is raised. **Rollover protective structures (ROPS)** over the cab are never to be removed for height clearance or other purposes. **Seat belts** keep the operator both in the cab in case of an overturn and keep the operator out of the crushing zone between the lift arm and frame.



Figure 1. Parts of a skid steer loader with bucket attachment. This image was created with the assistance of ChatGPT.

1. Lift Arm Attachment - Bucket
2. Loader Lift Arm
3. Lift Arm Hydraulic Cylinder
4. Rollover Protective Structure (ROPS)
5. Wheels (or Tracks, depending on model)

Before Starting the Job

Check the following before operating a skid steer:

- Fuel and oil levels
- Hydraulic fluid
- Cooling system fluid
- Cab, seat belt, and seat bar operations
- Lift arm and cylinder pivot points
- Safety systems
- Tires/tracks



Figure 2. Always have three points of contact for entering and exiting the skid steer. Illustration courtesy of Penn State Extension.

No Extra Riders

While it could be fun or quick to transport from one place to another, riders are not permitted in the bucket or on another part of the vehicle while in motion. A skid steer loader is designed for one operator. Do not allow children to operate skid steer loaders. Before any farming chore, notify a family member or farm employee of where you're going and what you're going to do.

Additional Considerations

Familiarize yourself with warning lights, gauges, and other safety devices on the skid steer. Make sure the attachment locking devices are in place after switching attachments on the lift arm. Adjust your speed to the working conditions. Be aware of blind spots when driving or maneuvering with an extended load or attachment. Never lift swing or move a load

over anyone. Be mindful when lifting loose materials like rocks and dirt as uneven ground or over extension of the arm could cause the load to shift or dump out of the bucket while transporting. Know where all the "pinch points" are on the machine and do not perform maintenance without safety features like arm supports and parking brakes engaged.

This publication was adapted from the following resources:

Penn State Extension -

<https://extension.psu.edu/suggestions-for-skid-steer-safety>

Texas A&M -

<https://agsafety.tamu.edu/files/2011/06/SKID-LOADER-SAFETY1.pdf>

Univ. of Wisconsin Extension -

<https://learningstore.extension.wisc.edu/products/skid-steer-loader-safety-p1867>

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