Today on *Across the Fence* a lifesaving program for Vermont farmers and tractor owners. We are going to be talking about the rebates for roll bars and an infusion of $140,000 to this crucial safety campaign. That afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. Sadly 2011 ended with two fatal tractor rollovers wanting Guilford and another in Castleton. Tractor rollovers are the leading cause of death and serious injury for farmers Nationwide. The saddest of all these accidents are avoidable in almost all cases a rollover protector structure that includes a seat belt can prevent death or injury. Joining me is Matt Myers. That is the coordinator of the rebates for roll bars program at the University of Vermont Extension. Thanks so much for being with us. This really is a matter of life and death.

Matt.: It is. As you noted in its the leading cause of death on the farm is the track to roll over but what many people don't know is that it's not just that tragedy on the farm but in the community seven of 10 farms that have a fatal tractor rollover are out of business within a year. It really goes into the whole community when there's a loss like that.

Judy.: We last talked when UVM Extension first launched the Rebates for Roll-bars Program. Can you remind viewers how the program helps tractor owners?

Matt.: Sure. We launched a little over a year ago. The UVM extension's Vermont's Rebates for Roll-bars Program offers a hotline where any tractor owner in the state of Vermont wants a roll bar and seatbelt on their tractor can call and find out what's available, how much, and we provide a rebate to the farmer or tractor owner up to $765. Most farmers see it as a good deal.

Judy.: And the rollover protection structures have proven to be effective?

Matt.: Yes. There's never been a recorded accident or roll over where there was a death if a tractor had roll bar and a tractor driver is wearing a seat belt. Even without a seat belt it's a 95% effective. With the seatbelt it's 99% affective.

Judy.: Newer tractors mostly have these features built and so what you're trying to reach our folks that have tractors that are older and need to be retrofitted.

Matt.: That's correct. Since 1985 manufacturers of tractors have agreed to put a roll bar kit on anything with over 20 horsepower. About half the tractors in the country were built before then. The ones that are in use many of those do not have protection they need to protect the farmer.
Judy.: One of the obstacles for farmers has been not only the cost but just trying to find parts.

Matt.: That's right. We have done studies and farmers have said even if you give me 100% of a rebate I wouldn't have time to find out where to get something for my '58 john deer. We do have a hotline and the database of every role bark it made in the world and we can tell them where to get them what they will cost and what it will cost after the 70% rebate.

Judy.: How does a program work? Farmers obviously or people who own tractors call.

Matt.: That's right may call our hotline number which is 1-(877)-767-7748. Any tractor owner in the state calls that number and we can help them find a kit for their tractor and provide a rebate.

Judy.: How has the program progressed? Have you had much response?

Matt.: We have had a great response in Vermont. It's been very exciting and keeping us busy. We've had over 220 calls to our hotline in the first year and have already retrofitted 70 tractors. It's a law to work but it's going very well. We've also raised funds as you mentioned Lamoille economic development corporation make huge commitment to Lamoille county. A total of 210,000 between their commitment and other commitments from cooperative insurance companies and several other organizations and companies in Vermont.

Judy.: Also some national recognition?

Matt.: That's right we did receive the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) national partnering award. We partner with businesses and we partner with researchers and nonprofits and we've done that successfully.

Judy.: On the subject of partnering you have some significant news to share with viewers this afternoon. That you alluded to?

Matt.: That's right we're very excited. The development corporation in Morrisville saw this as an important way to protect businesses in their community to prevent loss on the farm so they've made a big commitment to Vermont rebates for roll bars program.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit about that?

Matt.: Sure. We met with them a few different times and talked with them about the situation of the dangers in Lamoille County and a proposed a permit a certain amount to protect a certain number of farms and I think they tripled that. It's an what about the other farmers and tractor owners in Vermont. Let's make sure every farm in Lamoille County has a least one tractor did use on more dangerous tasks and is protected with all roll bar kit.

Judy.: Joining us now are two key members of Lamoille economic development corporation. John Mandeville is LEDC executive director and Dave Hallquist is the LEDC board president and also the president of the Vermont electric coop. John what's the role of LEDC in Lamoille County?

John.: In the broadest sense our role is to positively affect the economy. Either through job creation job creation efforts and we do that through working with existing businesses and businesses that are starting up businesses are thinking about moving into the county working with local government and in any way that we can to help and assist in job creation.
Judy.: Can you give us a snapshot of some of the challenges and opportunities for businesses in Lamoille County?

John.: Lamoille County is somewhat of an island and by that I mean we're not very close to any of the interstates around. We're in the middle of the state north of Montpelier and there's dozens of businesses that can effectively and efficiently and profitably operate the area so we have to be sensitive to that and when we're working with businesses we need to make sure that they are aware of that and that we can help them work through it.

Judy.: So what is the mission of Lamoille economic development corporation?

John.: Glad you asked that because we actually changed our mission about a year and 1/2 ago. We had a board retreat which had not been done for a while and it took a look at what we've been doing and where we thought we had to go. We've written a mission statement so our focus is on agriculture particularly value added AG and Agri tourism. Tourism in general and web based businesses. We continue to work with any and all businesses that can use our help but that's where the focus is on these days.

Judy.: Can you give some examples of the projects that you sponsored in the county?

John.: Most recently with done a few things like establish an online farmers market which has been going in Williston now since August of this year and on January 19 were opening up a second location in Stowe as a matter of fact. We've been working with the tourism area and recently have a grant to the Stowe mountain bike association to help them with the building of bicycle trails in the Stowe area. We believe that that is going to be a very significant effect on the local economy through the attraction of more mountain bikers to the area and there have been there before. Through the particular system there's going to be the largest mountain biking Center in the northeast so that's a pretty exciting thing. We're also working with the rebuilding of something called Barnes Camp. Which is on Route 108, on the White River, it's Smugglers' Notch. It's been rehabbed and will become a major visitor center for the area.

Judy.: Fantastic. Dave can you talk a little bit about how agriculture is important to Lamoille County.

Dave.: Sure. Agriculture is the production end of Agri tourism. With consumers heightened concern about food security and food safety Lamoille County who has a powerful role to play their in fact as Vermont being recognized as being wholesome and good we see value added agriculture as our new manufacturing. When you combine that with the existing strengths that we already have in tourism and the emergence of the Internet we can combine that to really build business in the area. We've seen some new businesses come in here like the Vermont peanut Butter company and rock art just build a new brewery which we helped. Women number of distilleries in the area and other food related production ventures.

Judy.: Tell me a little bit more about how and why the rebates for roll bars program is important to your mission and what you're doing?

John.: As we said before it is a significant economic impact on the local economy if and when a farmer does have a rollover accident and if he is in fact killed it's about a $910,000 impact on the local economy when a former is out of business and that's a very major hit on the local economy and of course the family itself.

Judy.: That's incredible I didn't realize that there was that big of a financial hit.
Dave.: And part of our New Mission the farmer becomes a very important part of that mission and we can’t afford to lose any of it.

Judy.: Have you heard from any of the 357 farmers in Lamoille County.

Matt.: We have we have six farmers in Lamoille County who have contacted our hotline and already retrofitted their tractors with roll bars seat belt kits and are now driving those tractors knowing that they’ve stopped their leading cause of death basically.

Judy.: I know you hopes to accomplish a lot more with this new partnership.

Matt.: Yes together we hope to make sure that every one of the 357 farms in Lamoille County has the opportunity to put a roll bar seat belts kit are least one tractor that they can use on the more dangerous tasks. Thereby reducing the risk that they have for death or serious injury.

Judy.: You figure that’s about 50 tractors a year?

Matt.: It's ambitious than ambitious: that's why we need everyone's help to get the word out to tractor owners in Lamoille County. 50 tractors per year for four years we figure that will bring every farm up to a place where they have a least one tractor. That's going to cost us we estimate about $35,000 a year and that's what LEDC has committed.

Judy.: We’re talking about farmers but really it's tractor owners who are not farmers maybe you too can talk about that too?

John.: Sure it's not just farmers it anyone who has a tractor and needs a roll bar. Obviously particularly and Lamoille there’s a lot of forestry that goes on. A lot of log cutting a lot of firewood and you please tractors for those. Those people are also eligible. Anybody who has a tractor in Lamoille County without a roll bar is eligible to apply.

Dave.: We just say we didn't want to distinguish between what the tractor did its most important that the owner is protected and I will say I've done the board 10 years this is one of the easiest and most impressive votes I've seen on the board in 10 years.

Judy.: It was not a hard sell?.

Dave.: It was not a hard sell in fact it was very supported.

Judy.: From previous programs you've told across the fence has been helpful for getting the word out about the rebates for roll bars program.

Matt.: Yes across the fence we actually did a survey of all 220 people who I contacted the hotline across the state and across the fence was the number one most likely way they heard about the program. I think they see this program they see a real people on it and they think wow that tractor owner almost died I think maybe I'll make that call.

Judy.: It's pretty compelling. With this new partnership you’re literally getting the word out to farmers.

Matt.: LEDC And UVM ext rebates for roll bars program is launching a campaign get the word out and were inviting businesses and nonprofits and individuals in Lamoille County to put our information about get the word out campaign on their web sites and on their countertops and on
their list serves and mailings so we reach every tractor owner in Lamoille County and save a are you interested in this program it could really help.

Judy.: We should probably give the phone number out again.

Matt.: That's a good idea it is 1877 767-7748 item of how I remember that but there is on the screen.

Judy.: How will the rest of Vermont can any tractor owner across the state access the rebate program.

Matt.: That's right this is a very intensive focus on Lamoille County with great support from LEDC. We have great support from the cooperative insurance company from across the state. Any tractor owner in Vermont is eligible to retrofit their tractor through this program by calling that hotline number and receiving a 70% rebate. And I did mention in Lamoille County a sweetened the pot a little bit its 75% if you happen to live in Lamoille County.

Judy.: Excellent. Hello to thank you for joining me today it's obviously a very important program and successful too which is great. That's our program for today I will see you again next time on across the fence.

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