As a young man growing up in northern Indiana, Bob Kulp fell off a tractor and got run over by it, a nearly fatal accident. Now a state legislator in Wisconsin, Kulp is looking to get state support for grants that help avoid these and other types of tractor-related accidents (they are the leading cause of farm-related deaths; see pie chart).

Rollovers kill almost 100 farmers a year, according to the National Safety Council, while even more people are permanently disabled from these incidents. Under Kulp’s proposal ([AB 827](#2)), state funding would go to cost-share programs that help farmers purchase and install rollover protections. These types of structures (roll bars or roll cages), plus use of a seat belt, are 99 percent effective in preventing injury in the event of a tractor overturn.

All tractors built since the mid-1980s have these structures, but about half of the tractors in use today were built before that time. According to Kulp, many farmers in his district, especially those with small operations, drive older tractors and plan to pass them on for use by the next generation of agriculture producers.

Six U.S. states, including Minnesota ([3](#3)), already have grant programs to encourage the installation of rollover protection structures. Over the past two years, Minnesota legislators have appropriated $250,000 and $150,000, respectively, and also helped raise private funds. (According to the state Department of Agriculture, private funds have been contributed by ADM, AgCountry, AgriBank, AgStar, Cargill, CHS Inc., Land O’Lakes and United FCS.)

The result: Minnesota provides the most financial support of any state for farmers to install rollover protection structures and seat belts.

“The state covers 70 percent of the cost of installing roll bars,” says Rep. Paul Anderson, who helped secure the state appropriation and get agriculture firms to contribute to the public-private partnership. “We needed to keep the out-of-pocket cost to farmers under $500 to maximize participation.”

On average, it costs more than $1,000 to add rollover protections (some kits are more than twice that amount). But with Minnesota’s grant program, the average out-of-pocket expense is $391.

“The program was well received, and all the funding we allocated in the last biennium budget was used,” Anderson says.

A cost-benefit analysis found that the program should pay for itself within three years because of reduced deaths and injuries, and Minnesota reduced its administrative costs by using marketing and website services that already had been set up by the nonprofit New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health ([4](#4)).

Farm safety also was the subject of a legislatively mandated report ([5](#5)) done last year by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The study found that 30 percent of Minnesota’s workplace fatalities are occurring in agriculture, even though only 2 percent of the workforce is involved in this sector.

The study’s authors included several recommendations to reduce farm injuries and deaths — for example, continuing to help farmers install rollover protections, creating a farm-safety certification program, investigating financial incentives to boost safety measures, and re-establishing a farm-safety faculty position at the University of Minnesota Extension.

In Wisconsin, AB 827 was unanimously approved by an Assembly committee in March. It didn’t go any further this year due to budget constraints, but Kulp intends to push again next year for a state-supported grant program that helps prevent tractor-related deaths on the farm.