

## *Farm Safety – Protect YOUR Investment*

### *“It’s OK to Look Out for Number 1”*

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More than once it has been said that farming is not just a job – but a way of life. In spite of the long hours, hard work and a constant dependence on weather and market values, it is a special and rewarding lifestyle. It is also common knowledge that the vast majority of farm and ranch operators place their families as the top priority in their lives. They also extend a great deal of energy and expense caring for their land, livestock and machinery. In addition, farmers and ranchers can be depended on to invest time, energy and finances in their schools, churches, and communities. This has been clearly evidenced in the overwhelming help in response to the natural disasters that have ravaged many parts of the Midwest this spring and summer.

As good as agricultural producers are in caring for others, they are not always as careful in taking care of themselves. When asked, “What do you consider to be the most valuable asset in your agricultural operation?,” very few will respond that their own health, safety, and ability to manage production agriculture is a top priority. When this question was posed to a county Farm Bureau membership in 2003, only 12% of those queried (about 85 people) identified their personal health and safety as a priority.

In visiting with farmers in a clinic screening setting between 2000 and 2007, we learned that the majority of them are careful to have the best medical and life insurance coverage they can afford.\* Initially, they were not as concerned about day to day safety issues that can have long term effects. Hearing protection, respiratory protection, eye safety and skin cancer prevention are crucial to the long term health and well being of agricultural workers.

On a positive note, when these farm operators were presented with hearing, respiratory and vision screening results and given samples of personal protective equipment, they were open to attempts to change old habits. There is no single type of ear plug that works for everyone and no one respirator is meant to protect against every exposure. The same can be said about eye protection, foot wear and head gear. Knowledge about the types, variety and construction of ppe will go a long way in the willingness to use the products. See [www.agrisafe.org](http://www.agrisafe.org) for an example of frequently used ppe in agriculture. Tips on sun screen and sun block products that are “farmer friendly” (the non – greasy lotions and spray on types) and rated SPF 30 or higher are well received and appreciated.

Health care professionals that work in the agricultural safety and health arena frequently remind ranchers and farmers to be sure their tetanus/DPT vaccinations are current. We are not as concerned about those folks with injuries that take them to an emergency care facility or doctor’s

office because they will automatically be asked about vaccination status and updated if needed. There is great concern over the relatively minor injuries that are the result of cuts, scrapes and puncture wounds. If tetanus vaccinations are not up to date, there can be serious consequences from a seemingly minor wound - rusty metal and nails, sharp objects and animal induces injuries will carry a serious host of deadly organisms. A tetanus or tetanus/DPT booster should be done every ten years, or sooner if a serious injury warrants.

In addition to the occupational specific health and safety needs in agriculture, farmers and ranchers need to be vigilant in regard to exercise, nutritional balance and adequate, quality sleep. For many of the workers in production agriculture, highly mechanized equipment means less activity and exercise for operators. Walking, swimming, and sports not only provide good cardiac workouts, but are great stress relievers and have a positive effect on cholesterol levels as well. Vacation time, even if it is not far from home, can bring more than just a change of scenery – it can provide an opportunity to re-connect with family and do wonders for restful sleep, blood pressure, etc. So many parts of our country provide wonderful day trip activities.

Last, but definitely not least, is a reminder of the importance of an annual general physical. Not only does this provide a good general picture of health status including a look at cholesterol, triglyceride and glucose levels, it is a key to preventive medicine. Documented records in a family physician or internal medicine office provide a good baseline and reference point in the event of a healthcare emergency.

In summary, looking out for number one is an important part of your ability to take care of others.

\*84 of the production agriculture workers seen during this time were participating in a Certified Safe Farm study with AgriSafe and I-CASH in a Wellmark / Farm Bureau study.