

Aug 15, 2012

To the Editor:

National Farm Safety and Health Week is Sept. 16 - 22. As leaders of state institutions involved with Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), we want to show our appreciation to all those involved in Iowa Agriculture for producing healthy, affordable food for consumers and boosting state, county and local economies. The approximately 90,000 farm operators, 180,000 farm family members, and 6000 farm workers who live and work on Iowa's farms are vital to the social and economic fabric of the state. Production agriculture and ag-related industries directly and indirectly employ one of every six Iowans (17 percent of the state's workforce), based on 2007 Census of Agriculture data.

Farming remains one of the most hazardous occupations in the United States; the risk of death or injury in farming is still about seven times higher than for all other occupations. In the course of their work, approximately 30 Iowa farmers lose their lives every year, while an additional 2,500 suffer serious injury. These figures are especially relevant during harvest season, as farmers are putting in long hours under stress of weather delays, machinery breakdowns, and high operating costs. This year's drought is producing additional stress and economic uncertainty as crops turn brown, the price of corn skyrockets, and a new farm bill is still unsigned.

This year's theme for National Farm Safety and Health Week is "Agricultural Safety & Health...A Family Affair". Just as farming is a family affair, safety and health should be a family affair as well. There isn't a better time to start a conversation about the safety of all family members than right now. Don't let an injury or death be the reason you get passionate about safety and health. Protect your family and your investment by assessing all your risks and reducing the ones you can. Consult with a Certified Safe Farm reviewer and set some priorities to reduce the risk of an injury to yourself, your family, and your employees. And don't forget to take care of your behavioral health as well during these unusually stressful times. Reach out and talk to someone. You'll be surprised how much it helps. Farmers can request a Certified Safe Farm review by calling I-CASH at 319-335-4233.

I-CASH is a cooperative venture of the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, Iowa Department of Public Health and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. As

leaders of these state institutions, we recognize the importance of our farm community and strive to protect its health. I-CASH is working cooperatively with our partners AgriSafe, Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, AgriWellness, Proteus, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety and the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health to promote farm safety and health.

We thank Iowa farmers, farm workers and their families, the I-CASH Board of Directors and Advisory Committee members and all of our partners for joining together to reduce the toll of fatalities, injuries and health problems.

Please have a safe harvest!

*Steven Leath, President, Iowa State University*

*Sally Mason, President, University of Iowa*

*Mariannette Miller-Meeke, Director, Iowa Department of Public Health*

*Bill Northey, Secretary of Agriculture, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship*