

43. Community Partners for Healthy Farming: Involving Communities in Intervention Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

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NIOSH is funding community-based intervention research projects for prevention of injuries and illnesses of agricultural workers. Community Partners for Healthy Farming began September 1996 for three years. Stakeholders in communities and multidisciplinary researchers are actively collaborating in evaluating new and previously developed interventions. Utilizing controls, each project is evaluating the process of community involvement as well as specific interventions.

Community Partners funds seven projects in six states (CA, IA, KY, ND, WA, WI). Three projects target ergonomic problems of workers with wine grapes (CA); nursery trees (WA); and small scale, specialty crops (WI). Other intervention research projects seek to reduce tractor-related injuries and fatalities (KY), evaluate tractor safety training and a previously developed, school-based safety program (ND), and in Iowa, feasibility of medical insurance incentives to farmers who participate in a special program, reduction of dust inhalation of workers in swine housing, and development of a model clearinghouse for agricultural occupational information.

During the first half of this project, we have confirmed some beliefs and identified some strengths and barriers to agricultural safety. Collaboration is not only valuable, it is enthusiastically embraced by workers and others in communities. Private and public sectors seek involvement, e.g. worker-related organizations, schools, youth organizations, grower associations, extension service, media, banks, agribusinesses, and both workers and managers of corporate and family farms; they volunteer their time, expertise, and financial resources. In agriculture the work environment is dynamic in terms of farm size, ownership, commodity and the influence of regulations, community norms, working children, and owner autonomy varies significantly from other work environments as manufacturing and mining.

Factors influencing adaptation of change include economics, knowledge of cost/benefit, availability of controls, and autonomy. Workers readily provide useful ideas to researchers. Workers quickly make adaptations to tools being evaluated; although these adaptations may be ergonomically useful, this complicates evaluation.

These projects are providing important data for directing intervention efforts and developing models for further work in agricultural and elsewhere. Furthermore, the processes developed may be useful models for working with construction, where the worksite is also dynamic and small businesses in other industry sectors, especially where voluntary focus on health and safety is important. With the growing interest of citizens in many countries for less government regulation and, at the same time, growing interest in health and safety, models for community involvement and motivation for voluntary compliance will be valuable.

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