

IOWA FARM FAMILY HEALTH AND HAZARD SURVEILLANCE PROJECT



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Agriculture is now recognized as the most hazardous workplace in America. Yet agriculture lags behind general industry in the application of the traditional preventive phases of recognition, evaluation and control of health (and safety) hazards. The dilemma of agriculture as both an industry and a way of life contributes not only to this lag but also influences the design and approach of a successful health survey of an agricultural population. The aims and approach of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [NIOSH] funded Iowa Farm Family Health and Hazard Surveillance Project are:

1. To determine the retrospective distribution of farming practices, medical symptoms, and traumatic injuries from a randomly selected cohort of farming families using a mailed survey questionnaire to a population-based, random cohort on about 500 farms.
2. To record temporal exposure to environmental and biomechanical/ergonomic factors likely to contribute to work-related illness or injuries by on-farm observations of a sub-cohort of these farming families.
3. To measure the levels of exposure to a small number of selected low-frequency, high-hazard agents or processes likely to contribute to work-related illness using traditional quantitative industrial hygiene assessment techniques.

Data collected in this survey will provide the basis for future investigative agricultural health and safety efforts in several directions. The health status data will comprise the first systematic, representative view of the health of American farmers and farm families. Hazard data will provide not only a statistical distribution of risk factors within this population, it will also contain a basis upon which to estimate the time or frequency of being "at-risk," yielding new insight into interpreting accident, injury and fatality data collected in these and other studies. Additionally, these data will be used to develop specific recommendations for modifications of tools, machinery, work methods and buildings which will reduce work-related injuries among this segment of the population.



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