



Summary Proceedings, 2004 National Symposium on Agricultural Health and Safety, Keystone, Colorado, June 20–24, 2004

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MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Summary Proceedings, 2004 National Symposium on Agricultural Health and Safety, Keystone, Colorado, June 20-24, 2004

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INTRODUCTION

Three national organizations joined for the first time to co-host the 2004 National Symposium on Agricultural Health and Safety. It was a fitting collaboration for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Agricultural Health and Safety Centers, the North American Agromedicine Consortium (NAAC) and the National Institute for Farm Safety (NIFS). The collective mission of these three groups is to serve those employed in production agriculture.

The conference setting in the Colorado Rockies seemed to enhance attendance. More than 250 participants from 35 states and six countries registered for conference sessions. Additional participants came to either exhibit health and safety products, or to attend one

day's sessions. The sponsorship of three diverse organizations underscored the key conference theme, which was to enhance multidisciplinary opportunities to discuss and address the health and safety issues in production agriculture. Attendees included health and safety professionals, university-based researchers, Cooperative Extension personnel, physicians, nurses, representatives of industries supporting the agricultural enterprise (e.g., manufacturers of implements, the seed crop industry), veterinarians, representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NIOSH and, most importantly, those employed in agricultural production.

This symposium served as a platform for the host organizations to disseminate pertinent information and current research, and to build networking relationships. The conference provided unique opportunities to listen and learn from a wide range of experiences, to engage in

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interdisciplinary discussions, and to identify knowledge or programming needs and to build collaborative opportunities to address those needs. The conference also provided a context for sharing products, innovative research tools, effective education, outreach and prevention approaches.

Each of the three host organizations capitalized on the symposium by holding meetings tailored specifically to their leadership and members. Baxter Black, cowboy poet, provided an evening of entertainment for an audience of more than 250 at the conference banquet.

GENERAL SESSIONS OVERVIEW

Each of the host organizations solicited presentation abstracts from their membership and helped to select or organize the program based upon topics submitted. The format included opportunities for plenary sessions, panel discussions, posters and breakout sessions organized by topic. Breakout sessions covered a broad spectrum related to agricultural production health and safety issues, including occupational disease, youth injuries, ergonomics, health and safety education, pesticide monitoring, farm vehicles and machinery, surveillance and health care. In all, there were 88 breakout presentations, 23 poster presentations, 12 program displays and four plenary sessions, which are described in more detail below.

Plenary Sessions

Title: "Workplace Safety Challenges in the 21st Century"

Presenter: John Howard, MD, Director of NIOSH

Dr. Howard highlighted challenges facing those concerned with occupational health and safety. He cited terrorism in the workplace and concerns regarding first responders to such disasters. He discussed additional challenges, including: demographic and social changes impacting the workforce, including the age shift in the composition of the workforce; increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the workforce and

the resulting challenge to develop culturally integrated approaches to worker health and safety; an increase in workplace participation of women and the need for gender-specific protective efforts; and technological advances, including the impact of the increasing use of information technology and resulting separation from traditional worksites. Dr. Howard indicated that one of the most exciting challenges involves the tremendous increase in the application of nanotechnology and the need to understand the potential occupational health and safety hazards associated with nanoparticles. Global economic integration was the final challenge highlighted by Dr. Howard, and he highlighted two areas in particular: the need to "harmonize disparate national health and safety systems," and to develop workplace standards that meet global realities while illustrating the cost-effectiveness of both.

Title: "Beyond 2003: Setting the Stage for the New Canadian Agricultural Safety and Health Strategy"

Presenter: Judith Guernsey, PhD, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada

Dr. Guernsey brought an international perspective to the symposium by presenting on the renamed and reorganized Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA). The Canadian Coalition for Agricultural Safety and Rural Health (CCASRH) was the precursor organization having been established in 1993. In May of 2002, the new organization was launched with an effort to be inclusive of all those interested in the health and safety of agricultural producers in Canada. Utilizing a strategic planning process and multiple consultations with many partners, both a vision and mission statement were developed. Partners from all aspects of agriculture formed what are referred to as "strategic pillars" of the new organization. The five pillars include: "enhancing safety and risk management skills among producers, mitigating existing and new production hazards, providing more effective strategies to assist those ill or injured, enhancement of profitability and international market access, and to foster new economic opportunities in agricultural risk management." Both procedures and results of

the collaborative planning process were shared with attendees.

Title: "Bio-Agro Terrorism Plenary Panel"

Presenters: George Henning, MD, DVM, Penn State University; and Jeffrey Levin, MD, MSPH, University of Texas Health Center, Tyler, Texas

Dr. Henning provided an overview of the history, definitions and variables that enhance the success of terrorist activity. He included information on the 2003-04 budget allocated to multiple entities including public health, emergency response, detection methods, labs, border security as well as basic research. Potential bio-terrorism weapon categories include biological agents, chemical agents, radiation and agro-terrorism, which was defined as animal or plant disease introduced to disrupt the food chain. Dr. Levin (presenting on behalf of Levin, Karen Gilmore, MPH, and Torey Nalbene, MS) shared experiences from implementing and evaluating an agro-terrorism workshop held on Feb. 12, 2004, in Tyler, Texas. The workshop included a variety of stakeholders and used a combination of scenarios and specific topical modules and a priority planning process to address the potential threats. Lessons learned from the workshop included the issues of overlapping authority, inadequate communication, the need to involve the community in planning and the lack of a "one size fits all" plan.

Title: "People Will Make the Difference"

Presenter: Miguel Morales, MVZ, Monsanto Dairy Business, California

Dr. Morales presented on worker training and related his remarks to specific experiences in California. He emphasized that the success of a dairy operation results from the right people doing the right things. Technology, genetics, and feedstuffs are accessible for any dairy. People will make the difference, he said. Dairy farm managers have been expanding their role to become "managers of people," and not just cow managers. "We could say this is a paradigm shift, from managing cows to leading people," Dr. Morales said. In order to meet the workforce demands in different regions, dair-

ies have hired Hispanic people to assist on the farm. As a result, in these areas Hispanic employees have become a very valuable part of the workforce. Their training and development become critical factors in the productivity and overall performance of the business. Investing time in training will provide the best return on investment for a dairy, Dr. Morales said. Training can be fun, it can be a motivator in itself and can help people grow and further develop. Dr. Morales' work has indicated that employees are most responsive to attempts to respond to their needs, and the jobs are better executed because the level of understanding is clearly improved. And because the prevention efforts are understood and safety rules are followed, the work is completed with fewer injuries.

CONFERENCE EVALUATION: PHASE 1

The conference evaluation plan included two stages. Phase 1 consisted of on-site interviews of a stratified random sample of registered attendees. Participants were asked which sessions they attended, and a series of questions related to conference objectives and overall organization. Phase 2 was to be initiated in December 2004 with telephone interviews of a second stratified random sample of attendees.

Preliminary feedback based upon Likert scale responses to section 1 and section 2 of the interview schedule is presented in Tables 1 and 2. The response rate was 72%, or 33 of 46 potential respondents.

The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the symposium topics were relevant to their interests. One participant stated: "The sessions were very good. They were comprehensive within the time frame. The new technology within the GIS talk was interesting . . . very appropriate. The [luncheon plenary] offered a nice comparison between Canada and the U.S." The majority also agreed that the information would be useful in their job. Said one participant: "I have done some networking here at the symposium and will take this all back to the office."

All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the symposium had provided adequate networking opportunities. The "non-applicable" responses for research and policy represent attendees not currently engaged in either of these endeavors. Respondents were also asked for feedback about the posters and displays pre-

TABLE 1. Conference evaluation interview—section 1. Likert response categories by day Monday/Tuesday

Question topic:	Not Applicable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Topics relevant to my interests	1/0	0/0	1/0	9/4	9/9
Sessions improved my knowledge	2/0	0/0	0/0	12/8	6/5
Information will be useful in my job	2/1	0/0	0/0	12/7	6/5
Quality of sessions was high	2/0	0/0	0/0	12/9	6/4
Content of sessions was consistent with my expectations	2/0	0/0	0/0	13/6	5/7

Monday n = 20, Tuesday n = 13, N = 33

TABLE 2. Conference evaluation interview—section 2. Likert response categories by day Monday/Tuesday

Question topic: Symposium allows for...	Not Applicable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Adequate networking	0/0	0/0	0/0	7/7	13/6
Research opportunities	9/3	0/0	0/1	8/8	3/1
Recommendations for further research	4/2	0/0	1/0	11/8	3/4
Interface between research & practice	5/2	0/0	1/1	8/6	6/4
Recommendations for policy	7/3	0/0	3/3	8/7	2/0
Adequate # keynote speakers	1/1	0/0	0/0	14/9	5/3
Adequate # concurrent sessions	1/0	0/0	0/2	10/7	9/4
Variety of methods of dissemination	1/0	0/0	1/0	10/8	8/5

Monday n = 20, Tuesday n = 13

sented during the symposium. In general, comments were very positive. "Very good . . . there is a lot of interest in them. People come into the poster room to mingle and learn about new projects. I would consider this as one of the highlights of the conference."

Respondents offered two primary criticisms: some of the displays and posters ran out of handouts; and the high number of sessions made it difficult to choose what to attend, possibly reducing networking opportunities.

SUMMARY

The High Plains Intermountain Center for Agricultural Health and Safety was honored to

take the lead role in hosting the 2004 National Symposium on Agricultural Health and Safety in Keystone, Colorado. The Center worked with a committee from each of the hosting organizations over a period of 16 months to assure a venue that allowed the three national organizations to meet together for the first time. Attendees appeared to enjoy the setting and the scientific caliber of the presentations. "The conference was good, and it's fun to be in Colorado," responded one, adding, "The conference enhanced networking with multiple organizations." Said another: "It has met my expectations of a conference. Good scientific quality."