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Sixth International Symposium: Another Milestone in Agricultural-Rural Health and Safety

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EDITORIAL

Sixth International Symposium: Another Milestone in Agricultural-Rural Health and Safety

From October 19 through 23, 2008, the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture (CCHSA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) held the Sixth International Symposium: Public Health and the Agricultural-Rural Ecosystem (PHARE) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the self-titled *City of Bridges*. Saskatoon provided a wonderful venue for this symposium for a number of reasons. It is located in the heart of Canada's agricultural-prairie ecosystem, which is in many ways representative of the Great Plains ecosystems of the world. Although the meeting itself was run in a thoroughly professional manner, its atmosphere was more informal such that easy discussion and casual conversations between all attendees was the fare of the day throughout the meeting. Thus, plenary and symposium speakers and chairs mixed easily with all, from young trainees to senior investigators, whether they were from Canada or any of the other 14 countries represented at this symposium. The feedback we received after everyone had gone home suggested that this was a very valuable experience for all attendees.

To the credit of all those involved, these International Symposia are becoming milestones that mark some of our major advancements in agricultural-rural health and safety. CCHSA, or its predecessors (the Centre for Agricultural Medicine and the Institute for Agricultural, Rural, and Environmental Health), have organized the past five International Symposia together with our NIOSH partners. We are exceptionally grateful to NIOSH and in particular to Drs. George Conway and Barb Lee, as

well as to Dr. Jim Dosman, former Director of CCHSA, for their vision, guidance and inspiration in these Symposia. Historically, the First Symposium (Grain Dust and Health, 1977) led to the development of the Canadian Grain Dust Medical Surveillance Program, and the implementation of recommended maximum dust exposure levels by the American Conference of Government Industrial Hygienists. The Second Symposium (Health and Safety in Agriculture, 1985) contributed indirectly to the formation of the NIOSH Agricultural Health and Safety Program, whereas our Third Symposium (Issues in Health, Safety, and Agriculture, 1992) led to the establishment of the Canadian Coalition for Agricultural Safety and Rural Health (now the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association; CASA). The Fourth Symposium (Health & Safety in a Changing World, 1998) broadened the scope of occupational health and safety issues in rural industry in the United States and Canada and also served as a venue for the 1st International Symposium on Rural Nursing, while the Fifth Symposium (Future of Rural Peoples, 2003) brought together researchers, policy makers, rural people, and practitioners to consider strategies, projects and processes that would contribute to healthy rural economies, people, environments, and communities.

Health and safety issues in agriculture and other rural industries present ongoing and significant challenges in research, education, prevention and outreach. The Sixth International Symposium: PHARE addressed these issues in the context of the rural-agricultural environment. The objectives of the symposium were to

(i) describe and share state-of-the-art science; (ii) allow its attendees to build relationships with other researchers, nationally and internationally and, concomitantly, develop knowledge translation networks; (iii) provide recommendations for further areas of investigation and study; (iv) provide recommendations for policy, health promotion, and disease/injury prevention; and (v) disseminate cutting-edge knowledge in the area of agricultural health and safety. This Symposium featured daily morning and afternoon Plenary Sessions and several dozen workshops and associated events dedicated to our meeting our objectives. It also hosted an international Mini-Symposium on Rural Nursing, the Canadian Rural Health Research Society's annual meeting, and CCHSA's Agricultural Health and Safety Network's Agricultural Producers Day. Furthermore, the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association Annual Meeting dovetailed with the Symposium in Saskatoon (October 24–25).

Agricultural production is under intense global pressure to feed the human population. In industrialized countries this has brought on a remarkable mechanization and increasing intensification of operations in livestock, poultry, and grains production, whereas in some developing countries this has promoted an increasing use of pesticides. Each of these advances brings with it challenges to the health and safety of agricultural producers. Rural industries similarly strain to keep up with today's economy and this too brings troubling issues in occupational health and safety, while we are just beginning to come to terms with the discrepancies that exist in health care opportunities between urban, rural, and remote populations. As we continue to gain the upper hand in some areas, our increasing vigilance

continues to uncover other areas in need of attention.

This special edition of the *Journal of Agromedicine* provides a small taste of the many communications that were featured at this meeting. I wish to thank our guest editors for all their hard work and dedication in bringing this issue to fruition, and also that of the professionals with the *Journal of Agromedicine*. Without their efforts this issue would have remained a concept to which few would have access. Last, but certainly not least, we would like to offer great thanks to those people or organizations that have helped us to put on this meeting. As noted, NIOSH again provided very significant funding and direction. We are grateful also for the funds we received from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (Institute of Infection and Immunity, and Knowledge Translation programs), Canadian Agriculture Safety Association, the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, and the University of Saskatchewan. Finally, thanks go out to all those behind the scenes individuals and volunteers whose contributions were critical to the organization of this meeting. We look forward with some anticipation to the Seventh International Symposium—Safety and Health in Agricultural and Rural Populations (SHARP): Global Perspectives, which will be held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in 2013.

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