

Delivering on the Nation's Promise: Safety and Health at Work for All People

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American agriculture is a foundation of our nation's success. The men, women, and their families who comprise the American agricultural workforce are a resource beyond our measure; through their cultural and economic contributions they sustain our nation. While those who work in agriculture represent a relatively small segment of our society, they share a disproportionate risk for occupational injury and disease. Agriculture consistently ranks as one of the most hazardous industries in the United States. Among the most significant and striking occupational hazards seen in agriculture are acute traumatic injuries and deaths. During 1995 alone, workers in the agricultural sector (agriculture, forestry, and fishing) experienced 22 deaths per 100,000 workers, which far exceeds the average annual fatality rate for the U.S. civilian working population for the same time period, 5 deaths per 100,000 workers.⁽¹⁾ Of special concern are the children (over 100) killed each year while involved in farm activities.⁽²⁾ Approximately 201,000 work-related lost-time injuries occurred on U.S. farms during 1993, which is nearly 10 injuries for every 100 farms.⁽³⁾ Those who work in agriculture are also at increased risk for work-related morbidity from musculoskeletal disorders, certain cancers, reproductive disorders, dermatological conditions, infectious diseases, hearing loss, stress-related mental disorders, and occupational lung diseases.⁽⁴⁻⁶⁾

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is the Federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related disease and injury. NIOSH research focuses on the full scope of occupational disease and injury in a variety of workplaces and workforce sectors.

NIOSH has a strong commitment to agricultural safety and health, which was bolstered by a 1990 Congressional initiative (Public Law 101-517). Recognizing the need to improve occupational safety and health for those in agriculture, Congress appropriated funds to NIOSH to develop a national program in agricultural safety and health. Since that time, NIOSH's program in agricultural safety and health has grown significantly and now includes over 31 extramural projects and 42 intramural research projects.⁽⁷⁾ The NIOSH commitment to agricultural safety and health is further seen in new NIOSH efforts directed towards childhood agricultural injury prevention including the creation of a *National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety*. In addition, NIOSH has created new agricultural safety and health intervention projects and intramural research projects and has funded new extramural grants/cooperative agreement projects aimed at preventing injury and disease in agriculture.

NIOSH is also addressing agricultural safety and health issues through the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA). NIOSH and over 500

organizations and individuals outside the Institute developed NORA in 1996 to target and coordinate occupational safety and health research nationally. NORA is comprised of 21 unranked priorities in three categories—Disease and Injury, Work Environment and Workforce, and Research Tools and Approaches—the majority of which have direct ramifications for agricultural safety and health.⁽⁸⁾ Twenty research teams (two of the priority areas are being addressed by one team) comprised of members inside and outside NIOSH are actively working to address these areas. A matrix approach of coordinated research in some or all of the 21 priority areas is being utilized to integrate NORA research efforts within specific sectors, such as construction, mining, and agriculture. Sector-focused research has had much success and continues to hold great promise for gathering and translating knowledge and information into prevention.

Partnerships play a key role in NORA and also in NIOSH's agricultural safety and health program. Over 250 of NIOSH's intramural and extramural partners in agriculture convened at the 1997 Agricultural Health and Safety Conference held at the NIOSH laboratory in Morgantown, West Virginia. The conference provided an opportunity to disseminate information and research findings, foster linkages and communications, promote scientific exchange and collaboration, and facilitate actions to prevent injury and disease in agriculture. Through activities such as this conference and the special conference presentations published in this special issue of the *Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health*, NIOSH is working with its partners to prevent injury and disease in agriculture and to deliver on fulfilling NIOSH's vision of safety and health at work for all people.

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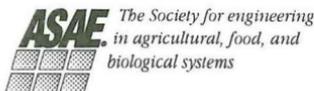
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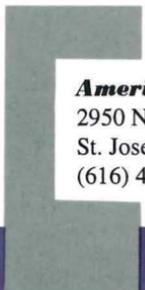


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