



## Commitment and Cooperation for a Common Cause

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## FOREWORD

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### Commitment and Cooperation for a Common Cause

*What would the children expect from those of us with the power to make them safer? They would expect that we would honor the traditions of rural families and communities, but that we would call them into question when they are incompatible with the safety and well-being of children. Then they would expect that we would work with their families and communities to build better, stronger, safer traditions—traditions that build as the first priority, the preservation of children, not the preservation of history.*

Nancy B. Young<sup>1</sup>

Our country's heritage is adorned with wholesome images of agricultural landscapes and robust, healthy children playing among livestock and vintage tractors. In the years before we were involved in childhood agricultural injury prevention, we shared many of these same perceptions—that there was no better place for children to grow up than on an American farm. Then tragedy struck, more stories were told, and *Successful Farming* magazine featured its "We Kill Too Many Farm Kids" landmark report. By the late 1980s, the serene image of children on farms was being shattered.

Farms and ranches continue to be a great place for children to grow up, and agriculture provides many excellent opportunities for young people to gain valuable work experiences. But agriculture continues to be ranked as one of our nation's most hazardous industries. Knowing

the realities of lives lost, we can no longer perpetuate the myth that injuries and deaths are merely "the cost of farming." They do not need to be. Children deserve the opportunity to grow up, and for some, enjoy a career in agriculture.

Since the early 1990s, three organizations—Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, and Progressive Agriculture Foundation—have worked side by side, conducting research, creating curricula and safety resources, training safety professionals, and working with volunteers. Many other individuals and organizations from the public and private sectors have been involved in what has become a remarkable and impressive national initiative. As a result, farm families and agricultural employers across North America have been reached through educational resources, community programs, and safety campaigns.

As organization leaders, we helped create the 1996 national action plan for childhood agricultural injury prevention that was endorsed by the US Congress, and we participated in its 2001 review and update. Our organizations continue to be major participants in this national initiative to reduce the toll of childhood injuries and deaths on our nation's farms and ranches. We are pleased with the progress to date, but know that our work must continue. We share guiding principles that are the foundation of the Goals and Strategies of the 2012 "Blueprint for Protecting Children in Agriculture." These include:

- All children deserve equal protection from preventable disease and injury.
- There are many benefits as well as risks associated with living and/or working on farms.
- Supervision is an important but insufficient method alone to protect children from harm.
- Promoting farm safety for children may challenge cultural and social norms as well as long-standing traditions; yet, the safety of children must always be a priority.
- There are many lessons to learn and share with our international colleagues, so that globally, children will be safe from agricultural hazards.
- Recommendations for the safety and well-being of children should be based upon child development principles and the best available scientific evidence.

Why should you care about this national initiative? Everyone depends upon the producers of food for their daily sustenance; and we are all directly or indirectly affected when a child is injured or killed in an agricultural setting. Families pay the ultimate price when they lose a child to a farming tragedy. The impacts of such are broad and deep, from the initial family tragedy to soul searching for answers; and along the way there is a spectrum of sequential effects, including economic hardship, reduced work output, and diminished quality of life. Nearly all agriculture-related deaths and injuries are predictable and, therefore, preventable. This is a very difficult lesson for parents and family members to comprehend. We believe no one should have to learn these lessons the hard way—through personal tragedies.

What progress have we made? Since the 1996 National Childhood Agricultural Injury Prevention Initiative was launched under the leadership of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), there has been measurable progress. Farm work-related deaths of youth 15 years and older are tracked at the federal level, yet fatalities of nonworking children (such as toddlers in the worksite) are not officially reported by all states. Thus, one cannot be certain that

childhood agricultural deaths are declining. Far more is known about nonfatal injuries. A national surveillance system periodically and systematically gathers information from farm owners regarding children's nonfatal injuries, enabling us to monitor trends over time. The latest data reveal that for nonfatal injuries of children who live on, visit, and work on farms across the United States, the rate of injuries has declined by nearly 60%, whereas the rate of injuries among family farm children declined by 47%.

In addition to injury surveillance, the national initiative has fostered research to identify promising strategies addressing working and nonworking youth, evaluated and refined educational programs, and facilitated the coordination of public awareness campaigns. Further, this initiative has enabled networking among numerous individuals and organizations to develop a united vision for the future in a spirit of cooperation and commitment.

We trust that the collective activities of many people, representing a range of disciplines, perspectives, locations, and approaches, have all influenced behaviors and practices, and in some cases, altered long-standing, unsafe traditions. The synergistic result has likely contributed to the measured decline in nonfatal childhood agricultural injuries. Why have a national plan? Since 1996, the National Action Plan for Childhood Agricultural Injury Prevention has provided a framework for setting organizational priorities while encouraging public and private sector funding. Looking back on previous plans, it is now possible to "check off" objectives that have been accomplished and consider the relevance of those that were previously proposed but not yet achieved. The 2012 updated plan sets seven new goals with respective strategies based upon injury trends, timely research, emerging technologies, and effective public health practices.

The process for updating the 2012 National Action Plan involved many stakeholders. Awareness of issues was increased, while newcomers joined the conversation and cause. An initial draft was posted on the Internet for public input in 2011, allowing the farming community and others to view proposed goals

and strategies. This public response generated many perspectives, including the rights of farm parents to raise children on farms according to their own needs and traditions. It is well known that agriculture has a “culture” of independence and places high value on individual rights; yet, in our role as advocates for children, we must challenge traditions and “rights” that run contrary to evidence-based child safety strategies.

We thank all the participants in the process of updating the National Action Plan for Protecting Children in Agriculture. We believe the updated goals and strategies are a step forward in preserving the positive aspects of living and working on farms, while minimizing adverse conditions that put children and youth at risk.\* We know that children depend upon us, and, indeed, expect us to be their voice among those with the power to ensure their well-being. We invite you to join us in our efforts to ensure that children and young workers can enjoy the rewards of a

happy and productive life on our nation’s farms and ranches.

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## REFERENCE

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\**Disclaimer:* The opinions expressed in this Foreword do not necessarily reflect the formal position of our respective organizations, nor do they imply complete agreement with the recommendations put forth by authors of papers in this issue of *Journal of Agromedicine*.