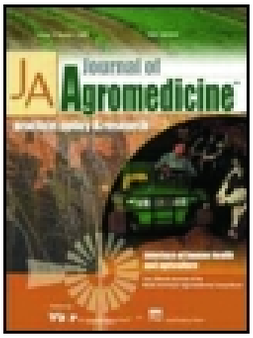

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AGROMEDICINE MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

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AGROMEDICINE MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

THIRD INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM: ISSUES IN HEALTH, SAFETY AND AGRICULTURE. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada–May 10-15, 1992.*

This update on the emerging science of health and safety in agriculture was organized by the Centre for Agricultural Medicine in cooperation with various departments within the University of Saskatchewan and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Scientific Committee on Occupational Health in Agriculture of the International Commission on Occupational Health. State-of-the-art presentations and recommendations were made in the following principal areas: Sustainability of Agro-Ecosystems as essential to human health, Respiratory Disorders, Injuries and Safety, Rural Health Delivery, Hearing Loss, Pesticides, Cancer Risks, Skin Problems, Cardiovascular Problems in Farmers, Stress and Psychiatric Problems, Health Promotion, and Preventive Strategies.

In the Respiratory area, there was considerable interest in the role of interleukin-1 and the role of bronchoalveolar lavage in the research to describe mechanisms of dysfunction. The Workshop on Grain Dust and Health focused on delineation of recommended maximum exposure limits, with considerable pressure towards a downward revision of the Canadian time-weighted standard to 5 mgs. per cubic meter. The definition, diagnosis and treatment of Occupational Asthma were discussed. Of particular research interest was an apparent association of cholinesterase-inhibiting insecti-

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cide exposure and asthma. Discussion of the epidemiology and pathogenesis of lung dysfunction in animal confinement workers was highlighted by a six-year follow-up study demonstrating a relatively high percentage of medical treatment for obstructive disease consistent with asthma amongst swine confinement workers. The importance of industrial hygiene in animal confinement units, and the difficulty in realizing preventive standards were discussed. Injuries to farmers and family members and safety programs comprised a large proportion of the program, featuring a number of surveys indicating excessive morbidity and mortality amongst farm workers. The NIOSH initiative to provide valid descriptive statistics on the incidence and prevalence of farm accidents was well represented as was sober reflection on potential causes and preventive measures. Ergonomic, industrial hygiene and engineering protective measures were presented. Occupational hearing loss was identified as an important priority, and a special session was held on rehabilitation measures for injured farmers.

The sessions on pesticide usage can be roughly divided into three themes: (a) methods of assessing biological dose, (b) chronic diseases and disorders associated with acute poisonings and chronic low dose exposure, and (c) educational methods which result in reduced human and non-target environmental exposure. An increased risk of Parkinson's disease and Parkinson's-like symptoms were associated respectively with previous exposure to herbicides in a population-based case-control study and with carbon disulfide fumigation among grain workers. In an ecological study, birth defects (syndactyly and limb reduction defects) were associated with increased concentration of atrazine in well water. Synergistic effects of cigarette smoking and farming were demonstrated for cancer of the lip. Other rare tumors (brain, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, multiple myeloma) were associated with farm residence, farming as an occupation and/or antecedent exposure to specific pesticides.

Social issues related to agriculture, including a comprehensive treatment of health issues for migrant workers, preventive strategies for health risks in rural women, methods of empowering rural women, and preventive educational materials, were explored. The Workshop on Rural Health Delivery was paralleled by a companion Workshop on Rural Health Delivery in the College of Medicine,

University of Saskatchewan, and these provided descriptions of various programs for health promotion and awareness. Other programs included a day on Cardiovascular Dysfunction in Rural People, and a special session devoted to health issues amongst Hutterite communities.

The last day of the Symposium involved a seminar entitled "Empowering the Rural Community: Theory, Research and Practice in Farm Stress." At this workshop, speakers dealt with psychological manifestations of changing social and economic patterns, the clinical manifestations of stress, psychiatric problems and suicides, and means of empowering local communities to deal with these issues.

The majority of the workshops not only considered the scientific evidence, but made specific recommendations for both research and prevention in each area. Selected Symposium manuscripts were published in 1993 by Lewis Publishers of Chelsea, Michigan, as an edited text entitled "Practical Applications of Health and Safety in Agriculture." Many thanks to our scientific colleagues from around the world who shared in the organization and scientific presentations.

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SOUTHERN AGROMEDICINE CONSORTIUM: SEVENTH BI-ANNUAL MEETING. *Jackson, Mississippi-October 26-27, 1992.*

The Fall meeting of the Southern Agromedicine Consortium was hosted by the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Member states of the consortium reported on the status of their individual agromedicine programs including current and planned projects.

During the scientific portion of the meeting, F.B. Carlton, Jr., MD, Director of Emergency Medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center reviewed the management of snake bites.

The effects of chronic pesticide exposure were covered by Dr. Jan Chambers from Mississippi State University, College of Veterinary Medicine.

Dr. Rathel Nolan from the Department of Medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical Center reviewed the prevention, diagnosis and management of rabies.

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NORTH CENTRAL WEED SCIENCE SOCIETY (NCWSS): 1992 GENERAL SESSION. *Chicago, Illinois-December 14-17, 1992.*

''Facing the Issues of the 90s'' was the theme of the 47th meeting of the North Central Weed Science Society, held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. The meeting, which was organized and chaired by Ted Warfield, was attended by more than 600 weed scientists from 16 states and 4 Canadian provinces.

In the general session of the meeting, Dale Miller, President and CEO of Sandoz Crop Protection Corporation, welcomed the attendees to Chicago.

During the meeting several speakers expressed their views on critical agricultural issues facing society. In his presidential address, Dr. Ed Stoller of the University of Illinois and USDA-ARS stated

that ensuring environmental protection and obtaining monetary support for weed science programs will be the main issues facing us in the 1990s. He indicated that the Society is well prepared to deal with these issues as it already has the proper committee structure and dedicated response personnel in place. For the future, he reminded us that our contributions are important in solving societal problems and urged us to get more involved with, and share our ideas with, those making policy decisions.

Dr. Stanley Schuman, Medical Director of the Agromedicine Program at the Medical University of South Carolina, discussed the food safety ''risks'' that we all face on a daily basis. He stated that, while our society is very concerned and vocal about contamination of our food supply with allegedly carcinogenic pesticides, it seems to be unaware of the numerous ''natural'' carcinogens already in our food. Dr. Schuman stressed that the food safety risks from pesticides and natural carcinogens are minor and that diet and exercise will go a long way in reducing cancer risks. He stated that the Agromedicine Program maintains current literature on food safety issues and that educating physicians to respond to patients' food safety concerns is one of the Program's primary goals.

Dr. Pat Kendall of Colorado State University also told the group that they have a responsibility to educate the general public on food safety concerns. Part of Dr. Kendall's message concerned how to promote rational alertness by the general public on pesticide issues. Dr. Kendall also said that, while the public needed to become better informed about food safety, the scientific community needed to become better trained on how to deliver the message.

The general session concluded with a presentation by Dr. Laura Lengnick, 1992 Congressional Fellow for the NCWSS in Washington, DC and staff member for US Senator, Tom Dashchle.

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