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To cite this article: Linda Fetzer, Pauline Boyer & Liane Hirabayashi (2024) Building Capacity Through the Northeast Agricultural Safety and Health Coalition, Journal of Agromedicine, 29:3, 486-489, DOI: [10.1080/1059924X.2023.2296665](https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2023.2296665)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2023.2296665>



Published online: 21 Dec 2023.



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BRIEF REPORT



Building Capacity Through the Northeast Agricultural Safety and Health Coalition

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ABSTRACT

Land grant universities in the Northeast (e.g. Delaware, Maryland, New York) have seen changes in their faculty or Extension level positions: Agricultural safety specialist positions have been left vacant or have been merged with another position with other responsibilities, which reduces the amount of time available to address safety. In response to the resulting support gap, Penn State Ag Safety and Health and the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety (NEC) launched the Northeast Agricultural Safety and Health Coalition (NEASHC) in 2014. NEASHC provides extension staff and other individuals interested in safety trainings (e.g. insurers, Farm Bureau staff) with opportunities to network and learn about best practices in agricultural health and safety training. Recognizing the importance of NEASHC's role in filling this service gap in the Northeast, the NEC included support for NEASHC in its last 5-year grant cycle (2016–2022) and has continued its support for the Coalition in their current five-year center grant (2022–2027). The NEC center grant is funded by National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) Grant #2 U54OH007542. NEASHC is an important component of the NEC's unified approach to worker health and safety, which is based in part on G. Sorensen's conceptual model for integrated approaches to the protection and promotion of worker safety.¹ The goals for NEASHC through 2027 are as follows: expand the Coalition's reach by adding states and members; provide professional development to members; (3) offer mini-grants for outreach projects and activities; (4) develop and disseminate new resources; and (5) provide occupational safety and health (OSH) updates for agricultural populations.

KEYWORDS

Agriculture; coalition; demonstrations; ISASH; Northeast; occupational health; occupational safety; occupation; outreach; trainers; training

Introduction

Land grant universities in the Northeast (e.g., Delaware, Maryland, New York) have seen changes in their faculty or Extension level positions: agricultural safety specialist positions have been left vacant or have been merged with another position with other responsibilities, which reduces the amount of time available to address safety. In response to the resulting support gap, Penn State Ag Safety and Health and the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety (NEC) launched the Northeast Agricultural Safety and Health Coalition (NEASHC) in 2014 to serve the 12 states in the NEC's region: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia.

NEASHC's mission is to increase awareness of agricultural safety and health issues and to educate the agricultural population about ways to reduce the risk of injuries and fatalities through training, resources, and collaborations. The Coalition was established as a non-dues-paying member organization of educators and trainers who meet annually to network and access new training materials. NEC and Penn State staff share responsibilities for coordinating coalition activities, as well as the financial burden of running the coalition; hosting the annual in-person meeting (includes travel/meal expense for attendees), production and distribution of training demonstrations for each state, maintaining the webpage, and – new this year – funding for training mini-grants. The goals for the NEASHC through 2027 are as follows¹: expand the Coalition's reach by adding states and members²;

provide professional development to members; (3) offer mini-grants for outreach projects and activities; (4) develop and disseminate new resources; and (5) provide occupational safety and health (OSH) updates for agricultural populations.

Expanding the coalition

By 2022, the Coalition had grown to include 25 trainers from organizations in 9 of the 12 states in the region. In the fall of that year, the membership structure was changed from one level to two, with a lead representative from each state and additional members from within the states. The state representative is invited to participate in the in-person 2-day spring meeting, is charged with recruiting members from their state to join the Coalition, serves as the primary contact to borrow demonstrations and teaching tools, and provides input on coalition program planning. Anyone with a vested interest in agricultural safety and health may become a NEASHC member. Since the structural changes were implemented in Fall 2022, NEASHC has grown to 34 as shown in Table 1. The effectiveness of the expansion efforts will be evaluated by the Bassett Research Institute using Social Network Analysis in 2023–2024 and 2026–2027.

Providing professional development

Members meet quarterly, with virtual meetings in summer, fall, and winter, and an in-person

meeting for state representatives in the spring. During these meetings, NEASHC offers trainings and presentations to increase members' capacity to provide agricultural safety and health programming in the twelve-state region. Experts from the NEC, other NIOSH Ag Centers, and regional partners are invited to present on topics of interested identified from NEC surveillance, emerging issues research, and member requests (e.g., mental health, oral health, per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances [PFAS], agritourism). Meeting attendees benefit from networking opportunities to share ideas, ask for assistance, and promote their outreach efforts. To facilitate continuous improvement of NEASHC services, NEC evaluators send surveys after each meeting, analyze the results, and provide summarized feedback to the NEASHC coordinators. The coalition also issues a quarterly electronic newsletter for all members and has developed a members-only Web page on the NEC Website (necenter.org) that includes a growing list of downloadable resources.

Offering mini-grants for outreach projects

Agricultural safety and health trainers often lack the financial resources to conduct outreach activities to priority populations. In response, NEASHC developed a competitive mini-grant program to provide funds of \$500 to \$1000 each year for four to eight agricultural safety and health projects or outreach activities by NEASHC members. NEASHC developed a rubric for the application review that includes the following: importance to and impact on the target agricultural community, articulation of need, and viability of the timeline and budget. An external panel has been assembled for the review process. The first year request for applications was sent September 1, 2023. Grant awardees will be required to present their outreach project to the NEASHC members during a virtual quarterly meeting and provide a brief close-out report with photographs or videos. Evaluation of the mini-grant program's effectiveness will include interviews with review panel members and grant awardees.

Table 1. NEASHC membership – September 2023.

State	Affiliation			
	NEC	Penn State	Other University/ Cooperative Extension	Others
Delaware				
Maine			1	
Maryland			1	
Massachusetts				1
New Hampshire			4	
New Jersey			1	
New York	13			3
Pennsylvania		1		2
Rhode Island				
Vermont	1		2	1
West Virginia			2	1
Total	14	1	11	8

Developing and disseminating new resources

NEASHC holds a 2-day in-person meeting in the spring at the NEC office in Cooperstown, New York. During this meeting, representatives attend innovative train-the-trainer presentations and demonstrations on a variety of topics. Recent examples include mental health/stress relief, tractor safety for youth, women in farming, high-visibility clothing, PFAS concerns for farmers, and migrant farmworkers.

In addition to these train-the-trainer sessions, NEASHC began building demonstrations and teaching aids in 2021, which are distributed at the in-person meeting to state representatives for use in their programming. The demonstrations are

provided in a travel-ready tote that includes curriculum materials and master handouts that can be co-branded with the trainer’s organization logo. The NEASHC web page on the NEC website provides links to curriculum and handout materials.

The goal through 2027 is to provide states with a minimum of one new demonstration or teaching tool each year. Beginning in June 2022, usage of the demonstrations has been tracked by the trainer scanning a QR code affixed to the demonstration, which takes them to a REDCap form to record basic information about the training event.² Demonstration usage data between June 22, 2022, and June 9, 2023, is presented in Figure 1.

Demo	Description	Events
 High Visibility	Learn about high-visibility clothing and tactics to prevent run-over by machinery and equipment	23
 Grain Bin	Understand the dangers of grain entrapment and strategies for prevention and rescue	9
 Wheel of Safety	Spin the wheel to test your knowledge on agriculture health and safety topics	7
 Risk Analysis	Use mouse traps to understand how complacency can increase the risk for injury	4
 Animal Safety	Learn techniques to work safely around animals	1

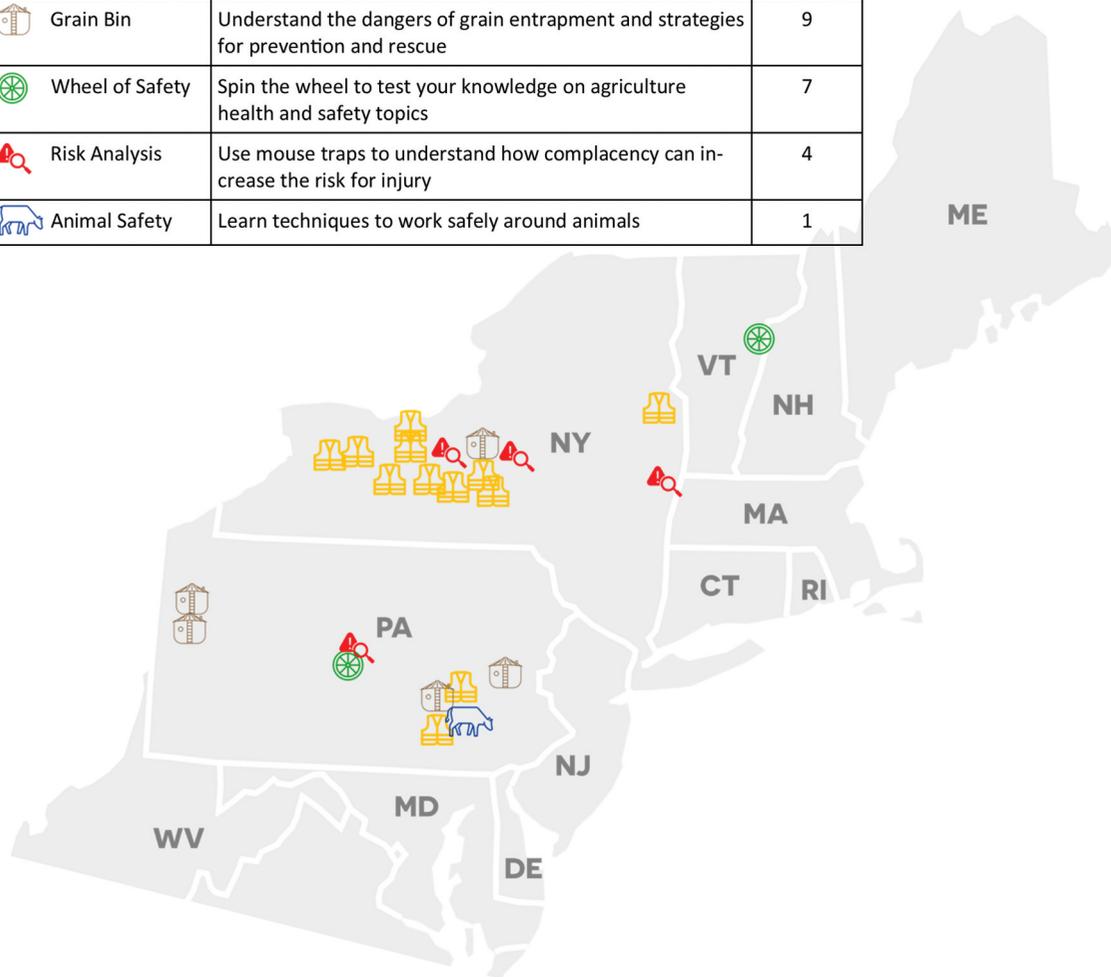


Figure 1. Usage of NEASHC Demonstrations (6/22/22–6/9/23).

Providing OSH updates

Because agricultural safety and health is not a full-time responsibility for most NEASHC state representatives, they have limited availability to attend in-person agricultural safety and health trainings. To address this constraint, NEASHC offers only one in-person event per year, provides virtual safety trainings quarterly and additional training opportunities when available. The coalition's quarterly newsletter and page on the NEC Website also provide educators with awareness of outside training opportunities, programs, and resources.

As NEASHC works toward achieving these goals over the next several years, the expanded and strengthened network of trainers will be well positioned to provide Northeast farmers and farmworkers the information they need to work safely.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health [#2 U54OH007542].

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2. Data were collected and managed using REDCap electronic data capture tools hosted at Bassett Healthcare Network. REDCap (Research electronic data capture) is a secure, web-based software platform designed to support data capture for research studies. PA Harris, R Taylor, BL minor, V Elliott, M Fernandez, L O'Neal, L McLeod, G Delacqua, F Delacqua, J Kirby, SN Duda, REDCap Consortium, the REDCap consortium: building an international community of software partners. *J Biomed Inform.* 10.1016/j.jbi.2019.103208. 2019 May 9.