

Summary Report

NIOSH CONFERENCE GRANT #1R13 OH 008839

Date: September 20-22, 2006

Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, CA

The NIOSH Western States Agricultural Health and Safety Conference took place Sept. 20-22 at the Asilomar conference grounds in Pacific Grove, Calif. Titled "Health and Safety in Western Agriculture: Research to Practice (r2p)," the conference was jointly sponsored by the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS), the Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (PNASH) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Additional co-sponsors were: UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environment Sciences, UC Davis School of Medicine, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, UC Davis College of Engineering, UC Davis Center for Environmental Health, California Dept. of Pesticide Regulations, California Department of Occupational Safety and Health, Beringer Blass Wines/Foster's Americas, Mariani Nut Company, Pedrick Produce, UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program and the NIOSH Ag Centers located in Texas and Colorado.

- Conference participants were from 11 states: Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Hawaii, Nevada, North Carolina, New York, Alaska, Arizona and Colorado.
- Nearly 25 percent of the 110 attendees represented Western states public agencies, 20% of the participants at the conference were students or postdoctoral fellows in training. Other participants included producers, industry representatives, private consultants, and non-profit organizations, along with health care providers and agricultural worker advocates
- Conference participants by their praise on site and through their completed evaluation forms valued the conference varied program and excellent speakers, thoroughly enjoyed the conference location and special events. The Beach Boardwalk BBQ and especially the National Steinbeck Interactive Center were hits. Each participant received a copy of Steinbeck's epic the *Grapes of Wrath*.

Keynote speaker George Conway, M.D., M.P.H., director of NIOSH's Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Program, stressed the importance of NIOSH's initiative of research to practice (r2p) to reduce occupational illnesses and injuries in the next decade.

The five thematic sessions focused on different areas of r2p, including new approaches for many university investigators to understanding the regulatory process of government agencies and advocate groups in shaping policy.

Thematic Session I – Challenges & Opportunities of r2p

Thematic Session II – Policy & Behavior Implications of r2p

Thematic Session III – Agrochemicals/Respiratory – r2p

Thematic Session IV – Community-Based r2p

Thematic Session V – Agricultural Engineering

In addition, speakers discussed educational approaches for understanding and promoting education through *promotores* (community health workers) farmer training sessions, and public education through social marketing and the local and national media.

Elizabeth McGloughlin, a conference speaker who has for decades worked to increase health and safety through legislative or regulatory change, suggested similar approaches could be applied to agriculture to implement a successful advocacy program.

The thematic session on agricultural engineering was dedicated to John Miles, an r2p success story. A professor in the UC Davis Department of Agricultural Engineering, Miles played a key role in developing safer agricultural production methods for more than four decades. Miles observed, “reversing roles, observing the operations and spending one season working with people is key to reaching growers.” Orchard automation was discussed, though little progress has been made over the past 65 years in finding better ways for harvesting, significant advances have been made in agricultural engineering, including new platforms for tree fruit harvest, and the use of robotics in orchard preparation and harvesting.

Ofelio Borges, a farm worker education specialist for the Washington State Department of Agriculture’s Farmworker Education Program, presented a powerful message in “Mitigating Risks in the Agricultural Workplace: Opportunities and Responsibilities for Employees.”

Borges shared his personal story and transition from a migrant farm worker to his role as advocate for the Worker Protection Standard and educator of Hispanic pesticide handlers on safe practices. Borges said, “When it comes to minimizing risks in agriculture, many different groups have to work together to be successful.”

He discussed the barriers (culture, language, literacy) faced by farm workers that come to the United States to work in agriculture, especially those who, like himself, come from rural areas in Mexico. Borges said traditional educational methods (the use of books and classroom settings) are not effective in training/educating farm workers who face these kind of barriers. Innovative training approaches are necessary to help farm workers apply what they have learned and, consequently, create greater and more direct impact on mitigating risk at the workplace in agriculture.

Agricultural safety and health researchers need to become intimately familiar with the daily tasks of farmers and farm workers as well as finding better ways to disseminate results, according to Borges. If no bridge exists to take research to practice, then all the money, time and efforts invested to conduct studies and obtain results are wasted.

“When we all have a better understanding of our responsibilities with regard to safety in agriculture, working together we will be much more effective in mitigating risks in the agricultural workplace.”

Conference participants enjoyed a reception and tour of the National Steinbeck Center located in Salinas. The surrounding Salinas Valley is one of the major vegetable-producing areas in the country with 240,000 acres of prime farmland and perfect location for the ag conference.

The most important take-home message from the conference was that collaboration, team building and leveraging of multiple resources are critical to facilitate the transfer of research findings into practice for the benefit of the community.

Dr. Schenker closed the conference by saying, “I am encouraged by this different perspective and conceptualization of agricultural health and safety, and I believe we can catalyze this approach to really improve health and safety in a hazardous industry. Agricultural health is a small group of individuals in a small discipline, and we will need to work together to achieve our goals.”

Attached: 2006 Asilomar Conference Program, including 21 abstracts, speaker biographies, schedule of events, list of attendees and sponsors.