



The future of agricultural safety and health: North American Agricultural Safety Summit, February 2018, Scottsdale, Ariz

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In order to keep pace with world population growth, we need to double food production in the next 20 years without doubling land in agriculture, said Joel Sherman, vice president, safety and corporate affairs, Grimmway Enterprises. “That should be in the back of everyone’s mind who is concerned about agriculture and concerned about safety.”

As food production ramps up, so will the percentage of workers who are new to agriculture, posing a large safety challenge.

“We get these in-and-out employees through guest worker programs as a stop-gap, and then the question becomes, ‘How do we train them in such a short timeframe,’” said Lourdes Gonzales, director of human resources, Gowan Group.

Sherman agreed: “Twenty-five percent of our injuries are to employees who have been on the job less than a year.”

Led by its industry members, and informed by its academic and research members, the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA) is uniquely positioned to match evidence-based safety

interventions with production practices and emerging safety issues.

ASHCA used this inclusive approach to address the future of agricultural safety and health at its North American Agricultural Safety Summit, February 21–23, 2018, in Scottsdale, Arizona.

“ASHCA is a big tent,” said Dan Hair, senior vice president and chief risk officer, WCF Insurance. “The Summit demonstrated once again, how much more we can do when producers, researchers, product groups, and regulators work together on problems. An example was during the poster session when I was able to introduce a client to professionals who could provide help with a very practical concern about fit-for-duty testing.”

The opening plenary panel featured Sherman, Gonzales, and Hair. They addressed the importance of “raising the safety bar” across agriculture from a human perspective (we want everyone to go home at the end of the day and be with their families) and a policy perspective (staying ahead of regulation is a big issue).





“I hate the term ‘Safety First,’ because it makes you think of it as something separate from your work,” Sherman said. “Safety is not an interruption to your work. It’s the way you get your work done.”

ASHCA, established in 2007, is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. It is a coalition of farms, ranches, producer associations and other related agricultural people, organizations, and businesses; joining together with safety associations, federal and state agencies, educational institutions, and safety professionals, all seeking to improve the health and safety of agricultural workers. The ASHCA mission: “To proactively address ongoing and emerging occupational safety and health issues affecting everyone engaged in all facets of U.S. agriculture.”

Summit topics included safety interventions around equipment, livestock and dairy, row-crops, grain handling, food and specialty crops, individual and workforce safety, and other

commercial agricultural production and business operational safety issues. In all, the Summit featured 20 breakout sessions, four general sessions, exhibits and ample time for networking.

The “future” was prominent throughout the plenary and concurrent panels. A complete agenda can be found at <http://ashca.org/2018-safety-summit/>. Some highlights:

- “Technology and unique approaches to addressing safety and health in agriculture,” described the value of rural health informatics (AgInjuryNews.org database) and the potential of an interactive, web-based prototype providing emergency responders onsite information about hazards (Farm MAPPER).
- “A 2020 Vision for Childhood Agricultural Injury Prevention,” made preliminary recommendations for action in the public and private

sectors, based on assessments, surveys, and interviews regarding the National Initiative for Childhood Agricultural Prevention (sponsored by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.)

- “Understanding Communication Today,” looked at changes in communication from technological and generational perspectives.
- “Investing in the Next Generation of Safety Leaders,” started as a panel reviewing the focus and funding sources of ag safety in recent decades, then making recommendations on ways forward, and finally opening into a general conversation among attendees on strategies to involve young professionals in agricultural safety and health. Building mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and industry is one key. “The first step can be as simple as an industry person calling a school and volunteering to talk about their research needs,” said panelist Dennis Murphy, Nationwide Insurance Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Safety and Health, Penn State University.

“We’re in this together – academics, ag businesses, ag producers and ag safety risk managers – and we share a focus on raising the bar on ag safety and

health,” said Jan Klodowski, vice president of Agri-Services Agency, LLC.

The Summit received support from 27 sponsors, including “Emerald Sponsor” Grimmway Farms and “Gold Sponsors” Agri-Services Agency, Gallagher, National Farm Medicine Center, St. Albans Cooperative Creamery, WCF Insurance and The Zenith.

“Safety in agricultural production is not a luxury, nor is it something that we can afford to leave to regulators to decide for us,” said Frank Gasperini, ASHCA President and CEO. “Intentionally and systematically building a culture of safety in agriculture, from the smallest to the largest producers or agriculture related businesses is more than an ethics issue, it is also the only way to build profitable and sustainable businesses.”

Planning is underway for the next summit, in early 2020. Like previous ASHCA-hosted summits, the event will focus on strengthening relationships to identify, test and implement cost-effective, practical safety strategies to enhance the well-being of workers in U.S. agriculture.

For more information, contact ASHCA, www.ashca.org, or 571-293-1908.

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