NC AgrAbility Provides “Way” to Match “Will” of Farming’s Disabled

You’ve heard it said before: where there’s a will there’s a way.

Those injured in agriculture are often more than willing to continue farming, but until recently, a lack of local and state resources and services meant the way was strewn with obstacles.

Over the next 4 years, with a $718,950 grant awarded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the North Carolina AgrAbility Project (NCAP) will make navigating the way to farming with a disability easier for North Carolina’s agricultural workforce, their families and communities.

Agriculture is North Carolina’s #1 industry, with 52,918 farms producing over 80 different commodities. We know that injury and illness occur in agriculture at high rates in NC, as they do throughout the country. However, no NC statistics are available on those whose injuries or health conditions have led to disabilities. More importantly, there are no services that specialize in meeting the distinctive needs of disabled agricultural workers. The North Carolina AgrAbility Project (NCAP) will address both of these deficiencies.

The NCAP team of Peers and Partners is led by Dr. Jimo Ibrahim of NC A&T State University (NCA&T), Ms. Robin Tutor, NCAI Interim Director, of East Carolina University, and Ms. Cynthia Sexton and Ms. Michele Proctor of the NC Statewide Independent Living Council (NCSILC). The NCAP Team brings experience, skills and resources to address the project’s goal of assisting those living with disabilities to continue farming and become more integrated into their community through its support network. The team will provide outreach currently unavailable to farmers living with disabilities through education, networking, service and marketing.

“Each year, more than 80,000 farmers, ranchers and agricultural workers in the US are injured at work badly enough to limit their ability to do their jobs,” said Roger Beachy, USDA’s National Institute for Food and Agriculture director. “Producers with disabilities should have every opportunity to be successful, and the AgrAbility program gives them the assistance and training they need to be profitable and maintain their quality of life.”

While the term “disability” often brings to mind conditions such as spinal cord injuries and amputations, AgrAbility addresses not only these but also many other conditions, such as arthritis, back impairments, and behavioral health issues. Through education and assistance, AgrAbility helps to eliminate or minimize obstacles that inhibit success in production agriculture or agriculture-related occupations.

Robin Tutor says: “I look forward to working with Dr. Ibrahim and the whole team. I am excited to be using my background and experience in occupational therapy working with agricultural families.”

The NCAP Partners bring together diverse but critical strengths to work with disabled workers, family caregivers, communities, and
NC AgrAbility Provides “Way” to Match “Will” of Farming’s Disabled

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health providers. NCA&T, an 1890 land grant institution and a major partner in NC Cooperative Extension, will complete the statistical needs assessment of NC residents farming with disabilities and provide referrals for the Peer Network. The NC SILC and NC's eight Independent Living Centers will provide evaluations utilizing the McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire. NCSILC will also build a Peer Support Network of farmers and rural community members through trainings led by Bob Fetsch of Colorado AgrAbility. NCAI-ECU will develop a continuing education curriculum and workshops educating health care professionals and students on rural and agricultural health care needs. Michele Proctor, a recent NC State University Masters graduate of industrial design, will engage students in NCSU's Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering in exploring engineering and assistive technology options for clients farming with disabilities. (See more about Michele on page 4.)

Be on the lookout for NCAP’s website, workshops and social media networks!

For Nurses, MDs: Pesticide Health Online Course Update Coming

By Alan Branigan, Eastern Area Health Education Center

Pesticide Illness and Health Effects, an online continuing education course for health providers, will be updated by the NC Agromedicine Institute and its partners with funding from the Pesticide Environmental Trust Fund. Available for free online since 2006 and last updated in 2007, the current course is available at AHEConnect at http://www.aheconnect.com/ahec/courses.asp and was funded by the PETF.

Designed for nurses, physicians and health care professionals, the course covers major pesticide categories and the clinical keys to recognition and treatment of acute pesticide exposure. Recognition of pesticide illness is critical for pesticide poisoning surveillance and prevention, and resources for reporting will be updated. In addition, information from the latest research results from the national Agricultural Health Study, underway since 1994, will provide valuable information about the long term effects of pesticide exposure.

The update will be more time efficient and user friendly in response to provider feedback. Currently the course takes three hours to complete. The update will consist of shorter modules, allowing users to complete only topics of greatest interest. Larger graphics and an improved user interface will also enhance the new course. Nursing and CME continuing education credit will be available.

Since its inception, additional funding and support has been provided by the NC Agromedicine Institute, NC Farmworkers Health Program, NC Division of Public Health, and the Eastern Area Health Education Center.
NC Farmworker Health Program Explores Latino Migrants’ Experience in NC Aquaculture

By Leah Gordon, North Carolina Farmworker Health Program Intern

Over the past five seasons, an average of more than a thousand migrant workers have entered the state legally with H2-B visas each year to work in North Carolina’s aquaculture industry. They travel from Mexico to work in eastern North Carolina processing plants, picking crabmeat and shucking oysters.

Until 2010, the Federal Bureau of Primary Health Care’s definition of an agricultural worker excluded those with H2-B visas who work in industries beyond crop production, such as poultry, cattle, and aquaculture. The Bureau’s recent removal of this exclusion may result in the North Carolina Farmworker Health Program’s (NCFHP) ability to expand its medical care and public health outreach to these underserved populations. NCFHP must now identify these communities’ needs and assess its role in improving the health of Latino aquaculture workers.

The struggles of migrant workers in North Carolina’s aquaculture industry have been, on the whole, overlooked by academia. Both quantitative and qualitative data on aquaculture remains sparse. To fill this gap, Leah Gordon, a Masters of Public Health candidate at UNC-CH, collaborated with NCFHFP this summer to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with Latino migrants in the aquaculture industry. With funds from NCFHP, the Carolina Center for Public Service, and UNC’s Institute for the Study of the Americas, this formative work focused on living and working conditions, health needs, healthcare utilization, and barriers to health care access.

Preliminary results have sketched a demographic picture of these workers and shed light on potential occupational hazards. Aquaculture workers are at risk for cuts and allergic reactions to the disinfectant chemicals used in processing. Living in isolated coastal regions, they also face obstacles to obtaining clinical care, including transportation, language barriers, cost, and information gaps. Over the next several months, Gordon will further analyze the qualitative data in order to formulate concrete recommendations on how NCFHP could best serve Latino aquaculture workers.

In addition, Gordon is working to raise awareness of this underserved population among farmworker advocates. Aquaculture provides an important source of income for workers’ families in Mexico as well as revenue to a rural region of North Carolina that has limited economic alternatives. Most of the migrants return year after year to work in the aquaculture industry and NCFHP can now contribute to making their experience working in North Carolina as safe and healthy as possible.

Plan Ahead to Emphasize Farm Safety and Health Week!

Visit http://www.necasag.org/ for more on this year’s safety focus: Grain, Vineyard, and Tobacco Field Safety.
Other than the obvious—staying away from PTO’s and being aware of yourself and your current situation—we didn’t pay a lot of attention to safety measures on our dairy, particularly in the form of PPE (personal protective equipment). I usually caught a few jokes and cracks for wearing safety glasses from my dad Junior or brother Van when using the weed trimmer. I knew I worked more confidently with it, but it was always seen as being a ‘sissy.’

So, when did farm safety and respiratory health become an issue at my family’s farm in Catawba County?

…Four years ago when we built our first four broiler houses. I was a graduate student of industrial design at NCSU interested in farm equipment and environments. It was there I became aware of the health concerns and realized the need for PPE. I knew no matter how tough we thought we were or what some in the industry said was appropriate protection, it wasn’t enough.

While Dad and Van co-own and operate the Proctor family dairy and poultry operations, my mom Susan helps with dairy and poultry operations, and owns and operates Windy Wool Windings sheep farm. It was Mom that introduced me to Robin Tutor and the NC Agromedicine Institute (NCAI). They had worked together in 2009 and 2010 with EMS, Farm Bureau, and the Farmer’s Market on a series of farm safety days in Catawba County. Robin and I met at the 2010 Southern Farm Show, and that conversation led to Robin being a resource for my senior design project.

Through Robin, I discovered agricultural health and safety resources. I learned more about the suspicions I’d had all along — and how to better help protect my family. It was nice to finally find the science proving I wasn't being a ‘sissy.’

With proof in hand, Mom helped me team up to push the guys to start using PPE. It was hard to nag them. It got on their nerves, and bothered us to have to do it, but we knew

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how important it was. It was better to be a
pain and potentially have them around longer,
than say nothing and wait for something bad
to happen that could have been prevented.

My brother Van caught on when we realized
how much my Dad’s hearing had diminished
at age 50. Dad’s phone conversations could be
heard outside the house, the TV was always
blaring, and we found ourselves inadvertently
screaming at each other to make sure he could
hear us. Van started using ear plugs regularly.

Through my thesis research of health risks
and concerns of poultry workers, and more
education through NCAI on the benefits
of using PPE, I was able to convince my
dad, brother, and mom that full PPE was
something we desperately needed. With the
completion and findings of my master’s thesis,
I had enough [disturbing] scientific evidence
to convince both my dad and brother of how
important PPE is, particularly respirators
with the correct level of protection for poultry
houses.

My dad and brother both now wear cartridge
respirators and ear plugs—particularly
for poultry house
clean out. They’ve
also made it a
priority to provide
the same protection
for our interns from the local high school,
Zack Blevins and Wesley Cope, who help with
house clean out.

Van recently invested in a full face cartridge
respirator for even better protection. He said
“it’s better than a half-face respirator because
it keeps the dust and debris out of my face and
eyes when I’m driving the tractor and caker
through the houses. I don’t have to wear ski
goggles with my mask anymore.” Junior (Dad)
and Van have even been seen using respirators
for other tasks on the farm, such as bedding
stalls and barns on the dairy and spreading
compost from the chicken houses.

We’ve spent
less than
$500.00 in
initial costs
on PPE and
everyone has a
mask with appropriate cartridges, earplugs, and
some form of eyewear if they want it. $500.00
is a lot less than what we might have to pay
for a trip to the hospital. With the right facts
and information, it’s hard to deny the value the
investment in PPE can make. We can all work
more comfortably and know we’ve done our
part to keep each other around a little longer.

Assignment AgriSafe: Extension Agents, CommWell
Health Staff Study Ag Medicine in Iowa

Thanks to scholarship funds from NC Cooperative Extension and the NC Tobacco Trust Fund
four North Carolina professionals attended the Agricultural Medicine course, an AgriSafe
approved training, at the University of Iowa the week of June 13-17. Laura Martin, Paul
Gonzalez, and Margaret Bell, Extension Agents from Wake, Sampson, and Carteret/Jones
Counties and Tina Bean, a Family Nurse Practitioner with CommWell Health are committed
to providing agricultural health and safety outreach and services in their communities. The
course covers many topics, including respiratory illness, skin diseases, behavioral health,
zoonotic diseases, agricultural injury and farm safety issues, prevention strategies and
personal protection equipment use.

The agricultural medicine course includes classroom and field experiences.
Carolyn Sheridan (L), Clinical Director of the AgriSafe Network,
demonstrates a respirator on Laura Martin (R).

Margaret Bell (R) and Laura Martin
(L) take a break after reviewing a farm
implement for safety hazards.

Tina Bean is an FNP
with CommWell Health in
Dunn, NC.

Paul Gonzalez (L) looks on
as LaMar Grafft explains the
waste conversion/methane
energy system on Amana
Farm’s cattle operation.
Train-the-Trainer Workshops: Rolling Out the Pesticides and Farmworker Health Toolkit

By Catherine LePrevost, Research/Extension Associate, NCSU

In March 2011, the Pesticide Board awarded a Pesticide Environmental Trust Fund grant to Julia Storm, Dr. Greg Cope, and Dr. Catherine LePrevost in the Department of Environmental and Molecular Toxicology at NC State University for Rolling out the Pesticides and Farmworker Health Toolkit across North Carolina: A Train-the-Trainer Proposal. Catherine LePrevost, who developed the WPS-approved Pesticides and Farmworker Health Toolkit, serves as train-the-trainer facilitator.

Toolkits are available in English and Spanish for 11 crops, including apples, bell peppers, blueberries, Christmas trees, cucumbers, grapes, landscape/turf, strawberries, sweetpotatoes, tobacco, and tomatoes. The focus is on each crop’s commonly used pesticides.

Through late spring 2012, LePrevost will provide free, on-site trainings for those who train farmworkers: growers; commodity associations; Extension agents; state agency personnel; migrant and community health center staff; outreach workers associated with the NC Farmworker Health Program, Migrant Education Program, and migrant head start programs; college student interns; AmeriCorps volunteers.

The summer is off to a busy start. LePrevost has already led workshops with health outreach workers, student interns, Migrant Education staff, Extension agents, and AmeriCorps volunteers.

What should you expect during a train-the-trainer workshop? LePrevost will provide an overview of the toolkit materials and the development process that involved both trainers and farmworkers. She will demonstrate training techniques using the toolkit flipchart and handouts and engage participants in the toolkits’ hands-on activities. Trainees will work in small groups to practice delivering the toolkit training.

By the end of the workshop, participants should be able to: identify the most significant pesticide hazards in farmworkers’ working environments; recognize the signs and symptoms of pesticide illness and injury; use all of the Toolkit features, including the flipchart, handout, jug-labeling and symptom charade activities, and evaluation tools; and deliver a toolkit training that engages farmworkers in discussion.

For ordering information for the Pesticides and Farmworker Health Toolkit, visit http://go.ncsu.edu/pesticide-toolkit. Contact Catherine LePrevost at celeprev@ncsu.edu or 919-515-2276 to schedule a train-the-trainer workshop.

Gallagher Represents AgriSafe of NC at AgriSafe Network Board of Directors

By Barbara Gallagher, AgriSafe of CommWell Health

The AgriSafe Network, the only non-profit organization that serves to address the occupational health care needs of farm families, held its Board of Directors meeting on June 25th, 2011 in conjunction with the ISASH meeting in Boise, Idaho. The AgriSafe Network increases the capacity and ability of rural health professionals to be competent in the delivery of occupational health services.

Natalie Roy, AgriSafe executive director, presided. Standing committees reported on progress and six new policies addressing fundraising, state affiliates, evidence-based guides and webinars were discussed and adopted. The cooperation of AgriSafe and the North American Agromedicine Consortium (NAAC) and other future directions of AgriSafe were discussed during the strategic planning session. Louisiana and North Dakota were welcomed as new state affiliates to the AgriSafe Network. Board members continued networking during a traditional Basque meal at The Basque Market.
ISASH/NIOSH Ag, Forestry, & Fishing Health/Safety Meeting

By Barbara Gallagher, AgriSafe of CommWell Health

On June 26th, 2011 Michael DeSpain, International Society for Agricultural Safety and Health (ISASH, formerly NIFS) president, and George Conway, MD, MPH, director of NIOSH Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Program, welcomed 133 participants from around the world to the 2011 National Symposium. This year’s meeting theme was “Strengthening Partnerships across Multiple Disciplines.” The agenda included health and safety surveillance and research, outreach, partnerships, and education. Barb Gallagher, AgriSafe Director, CommWell Health, had the opportunity to network with researchers, practitioners, safety experts, and educators.

The meeting was held in Elmore County-Boise, Idaho, the largest potato growing area in southwest Idaho and a major organic production area. The annual farm tour, a meeting highlight, stopped along the Snake River for an introduction to local agricultural operations. Southwest Idaho is a high desert region and without irrigation there would be no farming. Idaho farmers have a unique system to pump water from the Snake River uphill 400 feet to the crops. The tour also visited the University of Idaho Research Center where trout and other fish species are raised in raceways using natural spring water. Researchers have developed trout that can digest a corn and grain diet rather than fish millet, producing faster-growing trout and thus more food to feed the world.

Barb also attended the Childhood Agricultural Safety Network annual meeting where “A Blueprint for Protecting Children in Agriculture” was discussed and goals and recommended strategies for 2011-2021 were reviewed.

Welcome New Board Member

Dr. Peter Cowen, College of Veterinary Medicine, NC State University

Dr. Cowen is an Associate Professor in the Epidemiology and Environmental Health group in the College of Veterinary Medicine at NC State University. He and his colleagues are involved in research, education and extension programs in numerous areas of population health and public health, including risk assessment and food safety, animal biosecurity risk management, foreign animal diseases, West Nile Virus, microbial resistance in pathogens, zoonotic disease, aquatic health, and international trade. Dr. Cowen serves as a consultant to state and federal regulatory agencies concerning animal and zoonotic diseases. He joined the NCAI Board of Directors in March for their strategic planning session.
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