AgriSafe-NC Serves the Farming Community

They work in one of the most dangerous professions in North Carolina, yet about 27 percent of the state’s agricultural families do not have health insurance, according to research by the North Carolina Agromedicine Institute and the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research.

Many farmers must choose between paying for farm operations and paying for health insurance, which can cost as much as $500 to $1200 per individual. And if farmers do visit a doctor’s office, their physician may not consider the unique occupational hazards they face, such as skin cancer, respiratory illness, arthritis and mental health, said Robin Tutor, interim director of the N.C. Agromedicine Institute.

“We all enjoy farmers’ products every day. We eat them; we wear them. These people provide us with so much, so we need to serve our farmers in return,” Tutor said.

In an effort to improve health for farmers and their families, the institute has brought AgriSafe-North Carolina, a program that provides agricultural occupational health and safety screenings at low to no-cost, to eastern North Carolina.

Through AgriSafe-NC, the institute partners with Tri-County Community Health Council to provide health screenings and follow-up health services for farmers, their families and non-migrant farm workers. Services are provided at the Carolina Oaks Health Center in Four Oaks or at other convenient locations such as farms, agribusiness, or the local Cooperative Extension center.

“We want to be as accessible as possible,” Tutor said.

AgriSafe staff includes a family nurse practitioner, community outreach worker and family advocate. Services include health care with an emphasis on agricultural exposures, as well as education and outreach to prevent illness and injury on the farm. Staff can help to identify resources for affordable dental care, medications, diabetic supplies and dealing with family challenges. Farmers can also select and be fitted with personal protective equipment such as respirators, safety glasses, hearing protection and chemical resistant clothing.

Tutor called this a “one-stop shop.” “We want to look at the farm family’s total wellbeing, not just their physical wellbeing. We want to address the whole person,” she said. “And we recognize that farmers have unique demands on their time and resources.”

Carolina Oaks is open five days a week. Evening and weekend appointments at the clinic or in the community can also be arranged. Fees vary depending on services received and where services are rendered. Many services are provided free or at reduced cost.

The AgriSafe Network started in Iowa, where it has been successful in reducing health insurance claims costs for farmers. A $100,000 grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust funded the one-year pilot program in eastern North Carolina, targeting Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, Harnett, Johnston, Pender, Robeson, Sampson and Wayne counties.

Funding will continue through March, and Tutor said the institute is actively seeking new partners among agribusinesses and non-profit foundations to keep the program going.

AgriSafe-NC participated in several commodity meetings since the fall, including the 23rd Annual Southeast Vegetable & Fruit Expo, the Southeast Strawberry Expo, and tobacco production meetings in Johnston and Duplin Counties. AgriSafe-NC will be at the Southern Farm Show in February and will provide respiratory protection training at upcoming poultry (Duplin) and pesticide (Pasquotank) meetings.

For more on AgriSafe-NC, call NCAI at 252-744-1000 or Carolina Oaks Family Health Center at 919-963-6400.
Respirators, AgriSafe-NC and Strawberry Growers: A Good Fit

In the summer of 2008, as EPA readied plans to implement stringent new regulations for worker/bystander protection for the use of agricultural soil fumigants (methyl bromide, Telone, and Vapam), the NC Strawberry Association became concerned about how growers would comply. Debby Wechsler, Executive Secretary of the NC Strawberry Association said: “We published the proposed rules in our newsletter (most growers had not heard any of the details) and conducted a survey of growers to determine their current fumigants, use of respirators, and the effect that proposed buffer zones would have on their operations.” Results of the survey, shared with EPA and others, confirmed that most strawberry growers are small, do their own fumigation, and have few options for hiring a commercial applicator for this task. Only 29% of growers indicated they had familiarity with using respirators, required under the new regulations.

To increase grower awareness, the NC Strawberry Association teamed with the NC Agromedicine Institute’s interim director Robin Tutor to offer a session called “Worker Protection: Health, Practical, and Regulatory Needs” at the Southeast Strawberry Expo, held November 6-8, 2008 in Charlotte, NC. Grower response and interest in the session were high. The session provided growers from North Carolina and throughout the south with information on respirator selection and fit, medical clearance, employee training, and record keeping. The session also featured Mr. Ira Cline, a strawberry farmer from western North Carolina. Mr. Cline shared his positive personal experience in using a self-contained breathing apparatus and other personal protective equipment on his farm.

AgriSafe-NC was also on hand at the Strawberry Expo's trade show area. Robin Tutor was able to engage growers in informal conversations about respiratory protection and other agricultural safety and health issues such as heat stress, tractor and ATV safety.

It is anticipated that EPA will enact some version of the fumigant standards in the next few years. The NC Agromedicine Institute and the NC Strawberry Association are exploring ways to work together to educate growers and ensure that protective equipment is both affordable and safe for the user, while improving public and worker safety and sustaining economic viability. Others interested in working on this issue should contact Robin Tutor at 252.744.1000 or tutorr@ecu.edu.

Lunchtime Webinar!

Thursday, May 7, 2009, 12:00 – 1:00 pm
Free Continuing Ed for RNs and MDs

“Mandatory Pesticide Illness Reporting: Learning How to Comply & Basic Tools for Pesticide Illness Recognition and Management”

NC Public Health law now requires reporting of acute pesticide illness and injury. Join us to quickly learn more about the new rules and caring for your patients. Course content will include: guidance on when and how to report; background information on pesticides; guidance on how to identify and treat patients that have been exposed; and, review of informational resources that can aid with clinical management and patient counseling.

Jointly sponsored by the North Carolina Medical Society and the North Carolina Division of Public Health.

Target Audience: Physicians and Nurses • FREE professional education credits available!

More information will soon be available on the NC Medical Society website at http://ncmedsoc.org/; see “Meetings and Events, Event Calendar”.

REGISTER NOW! REGIONAL FARM SAFETY AND HEALTH WORKSHOP
MARCH 12, 2009 • 8:30 AM REGISTRATION • 9 AM - 3:00PM WORKSHOPS
JOHNSTON COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION CENTER, SMITHFIELD, NC

Learn how you can make your farm safety and health programs come alive! Hear and share success stories. Discover resources. Learn the latest on ATV, pesticide & farm machinery safety. NC Cooperative Agents may register online through the Extension Learning Management System. All others call or email Marylee Lannan at 252-744-1000 lannam@ecu.edu. RSVP deadline is February 27. Lunch will be served.

Sponsored by USDA Risk Management Agency, Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, NC Farm Bureau, NC Cooperative Extension, and the NC Agromedicine Institute
McLaughlin Explores Human Factors in Farm Deaths

“I knew that was going to happen; why did I do that?” This is just one of the comments that Dr. Anne McLaughlin, an assistant professor in psychology at NC State University, heard as she listened to North Carolina farmers discussing the hazards of working on the farm in focus groups last fall.

Dr. McLaughlin is director of the Learning, Aging, and Cognitive Ergonomics Lab. Her research contributes to basic theories of learning and behavior while acknowledging the importance of applying this knowledge in the real world. Her research in agromedicine looks at the human factors that contribute to serious injury or death on the farm.

Through a pilot project funded by the NC Agromedicine Institute, Dr. McLaughlin explored areas in agricultural work where human factors research would have the most impact. First she evaluated national data on investigations of agricultural deaths. She learned that most fatalities are older farmers (over age 60), most occur alone, most involve experienced farmers, most involve equipment, and most involve more than one unusual activity.

Through discussions with North Carolina farmers, she identified three areas for further exploration: hidden hazards, well-known hazards, and attitudes toward technology. Dr. McLaughlin noted: “Farmers indicated much training occurs through an apprenticeship model rather than formal training. Hidden hazards may not be addressed in this training either because they are poorly understood by the trainer or occur infrequently.”

Some of the hidden hazards mentioned by farmers included: fumes from machinery being repaired in an enclosed area, fumes from animal feces, and machinery speed. Farmers reported well-known hazards, including many tasks that required interaction with running equipment, typically during repair, despite warnings that equipment must be shut down. Research should also address attitudes; farmers were concerned with safety, but accepted that agricultural tasks often result in injury.

Dr. McLaughlin will build on these insights to explore better ways to prevent death and serious injury in agriculture. She acknowledges the NC Farm Bureau for bringing farmers together for the focus groups.

Research Sheds Light on Farm Vehicle Roadway Safety

Population growth and significant increases in development across the country are leading to changes in traffic and driving behavior in many areas where motorists share the road with farmers moving their equipment - changes that worry some members of the agriculture community. Now researchers from North Carolina State University have found a number of risk factors associated with traffic accidents involving farm vehicles, which could point the way toward changes that will better protect farmers and motorists.

Crashes involving farm vehicles on public roads are infrequent (they make up less than 1 percent of accidents in North Carolina), but they are a significant concern for farmers. In fact, a crash on a public road involving farm equipment is five times more likely to result in a fatality than other types of motor vehicle accidents. In an attempt to better understand what circumstances might contribute to farm vehicle crashes, Dr. Theresa M. Costello, a Ph.D. graduate in psychology at NC State, Dr. Michael D. Schulman, professor of sociology at NC State, and Dr. Roger E. Mitchell, associate professor of psychology looked at data from North Carolina farms to identify common risk factors.

Dr. Michael D. Schulman explains that the study identified five factors associated with farms that had increased odds of being in a farm vehicle crash on a public road. For example, Schulman says, size matters in farm vehicle crashes - a farm's odds of being involved in an accident on public roads increase as the size of the transported farm equipment increases.

Other factors included a farm’s using young farm vehicle drivers; using non-family hired help as drivers; a history of farm injuries; and use of non-English speaking farm vehicle drivers. However, Schulman stresses that - while the study found that farms using hired help and non-English speaking workers were more likely to have crashes - limitations in the available data prevented the researchers from determining whether the non-English speaking workers or hired help were themselves involved in farm vehicle crashes.

Schulman says the study finds that “a multifaceted approach that goes beyond the farmer” is needed to improve farm vehicle safety on public roads. The study suggests that future research should ascertain whether farm vehicle driver licensing, training, testing and monitoring would reduce the risk of farm vehicle crashes. And, Schulman notes, farmers themselves have suggested the creation of slow-moving vehicle lanes and better speed-limit enforcement.

The paper, “Risk factors for a farm vehicle public road crash,” was published online in the Journal Accident Analysis and Prevention.
February 27, 2009: RSVP deadline for March 12 Regional Farm Safety and Health Workshop. NC Cooperative Extension Agents register through Learning Management System; all others register 252.744.1000/lannanm@ecu.edu

March 12, 2009: Regional Farm Safety and Health Workshop, Johnston County Cooperative Extension Center, Smithfield, NC (See entry above for registration information).


March 23-24, 2009: Southern Extension Research Activity-37 The New Hispanic South Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.


May 7, 2009: 12:00 – 1:00 pm free WEBINAR for RNs & MDs, “Mandatory Pesticide Illness Reporting: Learning How to Comply & Basic Tools for Pesticide Illness Recognition and Management,” www.ncmedsoc.org/see “Meetings and Events, Event Calendar.”

May 12, 2009: NC Agromedicine Institute Board of Partners meeting, NC State University, Toxicology Bldg, Raleigh, NC.


December 2009: Agricultural Occupational Health Training (AgriSafe), Greenville, NC.