

# farm families **ALIVE & WELL**

News from Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH) & the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health

Vol. 10, Issue 4 - 2004

## Two Projects Broaden Focus, Impact of Center

A large number of elderly farmers and professionals who care for the health and safety of farmers will benefit from two new projects of the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health (GPCAH). The Center has received grants for the projects from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). An existing program—Certified Safe Farm—will be customized for a group that has not been specifically covered: Iowa farmers 60 and older. A second project will employ new technology to deliver agricultural health and safety seminars in a “virtual classroom.”

### *Focus on Elderly Farmers*

The average age of farmers is increasing, not only because of longer life expectancy but also because young workers are less willing or financially able to take over a family operation. With no set age for retirement, farmers can continue to contribute to farm productivity and stability well into their later years—that's the good news.

The not-so-good news is that age-related changes put elderly farmers at increased risk for agriculture-related injuries. The older farmer is more susceptible

to fatigue and heat stress when working long hours. Hearing loss can affect farmers' ability to recognize sounds that signal danger, around livestock for example. Decreased visual acuity affects driving performance. Machinery operation at dawn and dusk, times when vision is normally limited, can be especially difficult. Some prescription and over-the-counter medications can hamper reflexes, lower alertness, and decrease reaction time, all of which can play a role in on-farm injuries.

The Certified Safe Farm (CSF) program, created in 1996, is already serving about 250 Iowa farmers, but has not previously focused on elder farmers.

CSF reviewers are trained to conduct on-farm safety reviews. The program also provides health screenings for farmers and offers individual and group educational sessions on agricultural safety and health.

With the new funding, researchers will modify the



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## Machinery is a major cause of agricultural fatalities in the US—tractors in particular.

Between 1992 and 1998, data from the US Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) showed that 37% of all fatal agricultural injuries were associated with tractors. Between 1992 and 2000, over 200 tractor-related fatalities occurred each year. Studies in the 1990s found that overturns caused anywhere from 40% to 66% of tractor-related fatalities.

Much has been done to make tractors safer. In Sweden, the number of deaths from tractor overturns was reduced—from 17.2 per 100,000 tractors to 0.3 per 100,000 over a 20-year period—as regulations required rollover protection structures (ROPS) in the 1950s and 1960s. Norway and Finland also established requirements for ROPS, resulting in significant

declines in overturn deaths.

In 1965, commercial availability of ROPS for the US market was first announced. By the mid-1970's, domestic manufacturers had ROPS available for all US tractors being built. In 1985 the transition was ending: US manufacturers were no longer offering tractors without ROPS. Manufacturers have also improved lighting and marking on tractors and agricultural equipment, making them more visible and helping reduce highway crashes involving tractors.

However, many older tractors remain in use on American farms without ROPS, seatbelts, advanced lighting and marking, or protective shields. The National Institute



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The **AgriSafe Network** was selected for inclusion as a model program in the "Healthy People 2010: A Companion Document for Rural Areas," which features programs from across the country that effectively improve the health of rural residents. The AgriSafe Network is included in Volume 3, Section: Injury and Violence Prevention. To access the document visit [www.healthypeople.gov/Implementation/compdocs.htm](http://www.healthypeople.gov/Implementation/compdocs.htm)

Top tractor and equipment manufacturers are coming together to help raise the awareness about tractor safety through a campaign called **Keep On Track-A-Thon**. Between September 1st and October 31st, participating equipment dealers will be accepting your donated change for **Farm Safety 4 Just Kids (FS4JK)**. The Keep On Track-A-Thon will help FS4JK promote a safe farm environment and keep rural kids safe and healthy. Once the Keep On Track-A-Thon is launched, you will be able to see the closest participating dealership at [www.fs4jk.org](http://www.fs4jk.org). If you would like your local dealership to participate, please stop by and mention the Keep On Track-A-Thon.

The University of Minnesota has a newly designed **Agricultural Safety and Health web page** at <http://safety.coafes.umn.edu>. The page covers a range of workplace and public health and safety issues that arise from agriculture and closely related food industries. It includes current events and news, as well as links to data, project summaries, and research-based information.

An updated version of the **American Farm Bureau Federation's Farm Facts book** is now available. The 29-page publication includes facts and figures about US agriculture using text, charts, graphs and illustrations. It offers data on where retail food dollars go, farm ownership and production figures, food safety tips and more. The book is designed with farm and non-farm audiences in mind, and would be a valuable classroom tool. This is an excellent example of material available to inform the consuming public about agriculture's role in food production. For more information, go to [www.fb.org](http://www.fb.org)

for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducted a 1993 survey and found approximately 62% of tractors in use did not have ROPS; a more recent estimate (2001) is 50%.

In 2003 the 10 agricultural health and safety centers throughout the US that are funded by NIOSH chose to refocus attention on tractor safety. We published a "National Agricultural Tractor Safety Initiative" in January 2004, which presents our collective recommendations for policy making and funding, research, and coalition building, all aimed at significantly reducing tractor-related injuries and fatalities in America.

The challenge before us is to raise all the tractors in use (as well as how they're used and maintained) to the highest standards of safety as soon as possible. We plan to carry out research projects to increase our understanding of the problems and guide programs that will increase the presence and use of safety equipment. As we said on the first page of our document, "Never before has such an infrastructure and level of coordination been applied to the problem." In partnership with manufacturers, dealers, farmers, and farm organizations, we hope to dramatically decrease the number of injuries experienced and lives lost.



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*The tractor safety document can be accessed at <http://depts.washington.edu/pnash/tractor.html>.*



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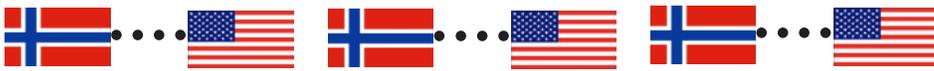
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## Scandinavian Visitor Welcomed

At last spring's agricultural occupational health training, sponsored by Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), one participant had definitely traveled the farthest: from Kongsberg, Norway.

Anne Marie Heiberg planned a visit to Iowa at the invitation of Great Plains Center faculty and staff who were in her country last year. Dr. Risto Rautiainen and Murray Madsen gave presentations at the Nordic Meeting on Agricultural Occupational Health and Safety. Heiberg, who coordinates work environment issues for the Norwegian Farmers' Association for Occupational Health & Safety, hosted the Nordic Meeting.

Besides the I-CASH training, Heiberg enjoyed numerous visits—to area farms, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS), Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, and other organizations. She ended her trip to the American Midwest at the 2004 National Symposium on Agricultural Safety and Health in Keystone, CO.

Risto Rautiainen, Great Plains Center Deputy Director for Intervention and Prevention, likes the information exchange



The Webers' 5000-head livestock operation in Western Illinois is much larger than Anne Marie Heiberg (left) is accustomed to in Norway (at right, Justin Weber).

that can take place when people from different countries confer. He points out, "Scandinavian countries are quite advanced in their safety and health programs for farmers, and a high percentage of farmers make use of the services, while in the US we have substantial information resources as a result of our research orientation."

## calendar

September 16

3rd Annual Iowa Child and Youth Injury Prevention Conference  
Blank Children's Hospital  
Des Moines, IA  
[www.blankchildrens.org](http://www.blankchildrens.org)

September 19-25

National Farm Safety and Health Week "Agricultural Safety and Health - Yields for a Lifetime."

November 6-10

The American Public Health Association's 132nd Annual Meeting and Exposition: Public Health and the Environment  
Washington, D.C.  
[www.apha.org/meetings](http://www.apha.org/meetings)

November 9-10

Building Healthy Sustainable Communities  
Sioux City Convention Center  
Sioux City, IA  
[www.stlukes.org](http://www.stlukes.org)

November 18-19

Midwest Rural and Agricultural Safety and Health Forum  
Hampton Inn  
Coralville, Iowa  
319/335-4438  
[www.public-health.uiowa.edu/icash](http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/icash)

November 29-December 1

Nordic Meeting on Agricultural Occupational Health  
Hamra, Sweden  
[www.jbt.slu.se/kampanj/NMAOH-2004.html](http://www.jbt.slu.se/kampanj/NMAOH-2004.html)

December 2-4

Canadian Agricultural Safety Association Annual Conference  
Quebec City, Quebec, Canada  
[www.casa-acsa.ca/english](http://www.casa-acsa.ca/english)

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This fall's Midwest Rural and Agricultural Safety and Health Forum will have a special focus. The 2-day meeting on November 18-19, 2004, at the Hampton Inn in Coralville, Iowa will involve participants in "Creating Partnerships for Agricultural Health and Safety Policy."

Charles W. Fluharty, of Columbia, Missouri, will give the keynote address Thursday, November 18, on "Community-based Rural Policy." Born and raised on a fifth-generation family farm in the Appalachian foothills of eastern Ohio, Fluharty returned home following graduation from Yale Divinity School. His career has

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*New Projects, continued from page 1*

program and then evaluate the new version with 200 farmers age 60 and older. The Iowa Easter Seals Rural Solutions Program will also collaborate on the project, helping to revise the safety review checklist and visiting farms of those with age-related disabilities to make recommendations for occupational adjustments and assistive technology.

### *Seminars at a Distance*

The Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health not only conducts research but also tries to make the results as available and useful as possible. Articles in scientific journals and presentations at professional meetings spread the word, but mostly to other researchers. Efforts are also made to convey information to the general public, through press releases, newsletters, and other media.

In the next two years the GPCAH will present seminars on agricultural safety and health research

through a “virtual classroom,” using internet-based distance learning software so that participants at multiple locations can be at their computers and see and hear the graphics-based presentations in real time. Participants will also be able to engage in verbal dialogue with the presenter and each other. No specialized equipment or expertise will be needed at any of the sites that link to the seminar.

More than 40 seminars are being planned for presentation free of charge. They will also be recorded and available for viewing by other audiences at other times. The seminar program will bring together agricultural researchers from around the country (and the world) to share their most recent findings and engage in brainstorming and collaboration with people working to prevent occupational disease and injury of agricultural workers and their families.

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*Fall Forum, continued from page 3*

centered on service to rural people, primarily within the public policy arena.

Dr. Fluharty is a professor in the Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri-Columbia. There he directs the Rural Policy Research Institute, which helps policymakers understand the rural impact of their work.

Forum participants will also learn about policymaking related to rural health care services and insurance, roadway safety, establishment of farm and safety programs, rural and environmental health and socio-economic policy. Breakout sessions will cover child safety educational programs, agricultural exposures and trauma, emerging support for rural mental health, agricultural injury surveillance, and personal protective equipment.

The Forum is co-sponsored by Iowa’s Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, The Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine, and The University of Iowa. A full agenda and registration materials, as well as information on sponsorship and exhibit opportunities, are available at [www.public-health.uiowa.edu/icash](http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/icash) or by contacting Eileen Fisher (319/335-4224, [eileen-fisher@uiowa.edu](mailto:eileen-fisher@uiowa.edu)).

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