



Safeguarding Farm Livelihoods

MRASH Conference Evaluation Report

The *Safeguarding Farm Livelihoods* Conference was held November 15-16, 2016 at the Terrace View Event Center, Sioux Center, IA. This was the 15th Annual Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference. The conference was primarily a networking and continuing education opportunity for farmers and farm workers, healthcare providers, agricultural safety and health professionals, researchers, policy makers, and agribusiness representatives. It was the second year of an experiment testing the feasibility of holding the conference in a rural location.

55 people attended the conference, representing 7 US states and Canada. In addition, 20 undergraduate students from Dordt College participated in the poster session and the health fair. Researchers from several Midwestern universities and NIOSH Ag Centers were the largest group of attendees, followed by students, agricultural safety and health professionals, healthcare providers, and agribusiness. Attendance was affected by a number of last minute cancellations due to illness and injury. While a few participants commented on the lower-than-usual attendance, overall the evaluations reflected a high level of satisfaction with the event.

36 people completed the conference evaluation form at the event. Overall, conference evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, with a few exceptions.

- 94% thought that the conference was a valuable use of their time
- 86% said the registration process was easy to navigate
- 100% reported being satisfied with the meeting facilities
- 85% believed the conference would result in stronger collaborative relationships among producers, agribusiness, researchers, policy makers, and agricultural health and safety partners.
- 82% left with a better understanding of the occupational hazards experienced by farmers and farm workers as a result of this conference
- 69% thought the rural location enhance the value of the conference

Exceptions from positive comments included a preference for shorter breakout sessions, dislike of the format for the “safety by design” panel, a call for a higher level of rigor and understanding from presenters, and better time management (related to late starts). Suggestions for improvement for future conferences included having a health professions track, more input from the education and industry sectors, and requests for tours of local farms or agriculture related industries.

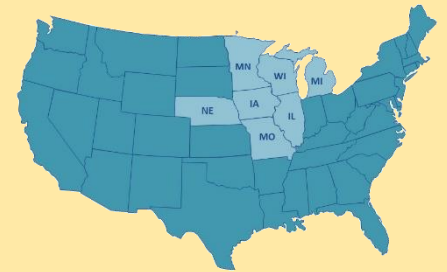
The attendees were almost evenly split on their preference for a rural location vs an urban/suburban. Comments about the rural location included that it is inconvenient, especially given a lack of tours or attendance by local farmers. Others said that they like the rural venue, but wondered if it was negatively affecting attendance.

At a glance...

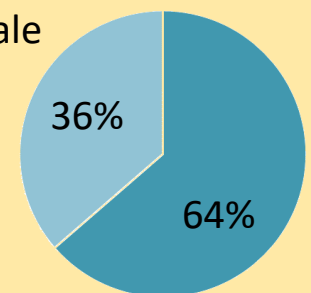
55

participants

From 7 states



Male



Female

“
I learned so much at this conference but I will take back an ability to change the culture of my company towards safety.
”

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MRASH Conference Evaluation Report (continued)

At a glance...

2 keynote speakers

3 panel discussions

18 oral presentations

16 posters presented

“LOVED having the Dordt college undergrads present side-by-side w/ grad students. Great evening event!”

“I was amazed at the people. There was a passion for health and safety.”

The keynote presentation on “safety by design” received positive reviews, with nearly 80% agreement that they had increased understanding about the hierarchy of controls and how hazards can be designed out of agricultural equipment and buildings. Over 93% of participants also agreed that the keynote + panel discussion was a good format for presenting this information. However, a couple people did not like the format of this panel.

Overall, the breakout sessions received high marks and positive comments. Nearly 83% thought they were helpful in keeping current on research findings relevant to their field. Over 93% thought the breakout sessions were the appropriate length for the information presented.. This year’s poster presentation was highly praised, with over 85% agreement that the posters were helpful in keeping current on research findings relevant to their field. Participants were particularly pleased with interaction with the undergraduate students from Dordt College. Many comments expressed appreciation for their efforts and a desire to continue engaging with students at future MRASH conferences.

Concurrent panels and small group table discussions continue to be favorite learning formats among attendees. Several participants expressed a desire for more time spent in these smaller groups. There were numerous comments about the value of the immigration panel in particular.

Conference sponsors wanted to give back to the local community, and so a health fair and safety expo was planned to occur on Wednesday afternoon. Over 10 local and regional partners collaborated to organize this event, which covered more than 18 different agricultural health and safety topics. However, this event was virtually unattended by the local community. Factors that may have caused this are timing of the event, and the perception that it was only for families.

Conference organizers were interested in knowing what the take-away items from the conference would be, so we specifically asked for this information. Agribusiness representatives expressed that they had learned how they could change the culture around safety in their workplace. Healthcare workers commented that they had a much better understanding of the risks and stressors that immigrant and migrant workers experience, and felt they would be better able to serve those patients’ healthcare needs in the future. Researchers and students commented on having a greater understanding of the need for translation of research learned new methods to apply to their work, and the particular challenges faced by immigrant and migrant workers. Ag safety & health professionals said they would be attempting to improve their communication with other organizations in the region shared a common mission.

In conclusion, the conference was rated very high by almost all participants. Participation in the conference evaluation increased to 65% – collecting evaluation forms as people got in line for lunch on day two was a fairly effective incentive. However, in the rush to finish evaluations so they could get their lunch, many people did not complete the entire form.