

Iowa Farmer Today

Safety Watch: I-CASH grants help spread safety to future farmers

By Brandi Janssen

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Hancock County 4-H members use puppets to share poison control messages with area daycare centers.

Photo submitted

What chores are appropriate for young people who live on farms?
How do you ensure that children on farms stay away from agricultural chemicals?

How do you encourage safe working habits around livestock as young people become involved in 4-H and FFA programs?

These are all questions that come up among agricultural safety and health professionals, but they are important for high school agriculture courses as well.

“Farm safety is important in a high school ag curriculum because a lot of ag students will either be working on their family farm or work for a local farmer in the area,” says Lone Tree FFA Advisor Bridget Mahoney.

Her chapter goes beyond just focusing on safety for the FFA members. Mahoney’s students also work in their community to promote farm safety for younger kids, whether or not they live on farms.

The National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety based in Marshfield, Wis., estimates that 38 children are injured every day on farms nationwide. The leading causes of injuries to young people on farms are falls, livestock and incidents involving motor vehicles.

In addition, about three young people are fatally injured every day on U.S. farms, with incidents involving machinery and motor vehicles, including ATVs, being the most common.

The National Children’s Center reports that while youth injuries are declining overall, injuries among youths under age 10 are increasing.

To address some of these issues, the Lone Tree FFA recently organized and hosted a farm safety day for fifth-grade students that focused on PTOs, tractor and ATV safety.

“In our chapter, we hope that by educating students at a young age will help reduce the number of farm related incidents,” Mahoney notes.

“We chose to host a farm safety day for all of our fifth-grade students, seeing that that is about the age where children get more independent jobs around the farm.”

The event was funded in part by Iowa’s Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), based at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. I-CASH is a statewide collaboration between the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Iowa Department of Public Health.

Since 1998, I-CASH has promoted farm safety through a youth grant program, awarding \$500 grants to youth groups across the state each year.

One hundred forty-six grants, totaling over \$75,000, have been invested across the state to support youth farm safety projects.

In 2015, I-CASH awarded nine grants, covering topics from tractor safety to combating fatigue during harvest season.

In Hancock County, ISU Extension’s 4-H program addressed poison control and awareness on farms. The group used social media to encourage safe storage of agricultural chemicals and advertise the statewide poison control phone number.

In addition, the 4-H members educated children at local daycare centers about poison control by developing and presenting a puppet show. The group hopes to develop a similar presentation for older children next year.

The grants are available to any Iowa-based youth organization with an interest in farm safety or health. The application is available on the I-CASH website (www.i-cash.org).

In addition, I-CASH awards an Outstanding Youth Grant prize at the annual Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) forum in November. This year, one of the nine 2015 grant awardees will be presented this honor.

Mahoney says the I-CASH grants have been helpful for their FFA chapter's farm safety day.

"We were able to make our safety day larger than before and have more interactive and hands-on learning opportunities for the elementary students that participated," she said.

Lessons in farm safety should happen "early and often." FFA and other youth organizations provide an important service to Iowa's farmers by contributing to the farm safety education of even the youngest of our future farmers.

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