

Iowa Farmer Today

Young Iowans work to improve farm safety

By Tabitha Kuehn, Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

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Southwest Valley FFA members Ethan James, Tyler James, Chase Sonntag and Reagan Sonntag distributed reflective tape and SMV signs at a local tractor ride event.

Photo courtesy Blake Anderson/Southwest Valley FFA

Many young farmers have a mentor they learn from and look up to. Grandparents, parents, siblings, first bosses, ag teachers and more can all provide valuable life and farm lessons.

Oftentimes overlooked is the impact that young farmers can have on their mentors.

Between May and November 2023, agricultural youth groups across Iowa carried out agricultural safety projects in their communities as part of Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health Annual Agricultural Youth Grant Program. I spoke with a few students and advisors involved in these projects as they reflected on their experiences, and the effect on the farmers in their respective communities was evident.

In Corning, Southwest Valley FFA provided local farmers with reflective tape and slow-moving vehicle signs for farm equipment at a local tractor ride event. Southwest Valley FFA members recognized the importance of farmers continuing to learn about safety and having access to safety materials.

“I believe the best way to get farmers to take safety measures is to make sure that they have all the necessary safety equipment and materials,” Ethan James, one of the Southwest Valley FFA members, said. “Farmers are then fully prepared for all different types of situations and problems that may occur. They are usually more willing to implement safety measures if they are fully prepared and supplied.”

The experience also provided learning opportunities for the students.

“A lot of the safety information provided to the farmers was actually new information that I had never heard of before,” said James.

Meghan Bond, FFA advisor and agriculture teacher at Central Community Schools in Elkader, also noted the importance of students learning about agricultural safety through the project.

“Get the buy-in from the younger generation, then you’ll see the change in the generations to come,” said Bond.

A group of Central Community FFA members conducted a project that supplied farmers with a lunch and tools, like sunscreen, to implement UV safety on the farm. Students were able to speak with farmers about the importance of protecting their skin and hear farmer’s health experiences from sun exposure.

Bond viewed the benefits of this project as a “trickle-down effect.” Students learning and engaging with farm health and safety information will be more equipped to implement these best practices as they take over farming and will instill this safety culture in their children.

“I truly believe you have to get the change through the kids,” Bond reiterated.

When deciding what resources to give, they utilized their own experiences to choose items that would be most realistic and likely to be used by actual farmers. They delivered hats, sunscreen, SPF lip balm, and other items that would be easy for working farmers to use and keep close by.

Many past grant recipients also reflected on the life skills that students learned from projects. This program aims to put students in the driver’s seat of project implementation, and many groups get experience with brainstorming, securing in-kind resources, communicating with local partners and farmers and beyond.

I-CASH is now accepting applications for the 2024 agricultural youth grants. The application deadline is April 1. Apply at tinyurl.com/yn3ftdje.

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