

## Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference - November 13-14, 2025

by Gayle Olson, MS, CHES, I-CASH Assistant to the Director



Once September hits, it's only a couple of short months until MRASH, the 2025 [Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health Conference](#)! In a year with many big changes for agriculture and public health, the conference planning team has created a conference program that promises to be interesting, engaging and practical. We will be gathering on November 13-14 at [Hotel Millwright](#) in Amana with the theme "Cultivating Connections: Health, Safety and Wellness in Agriculture." [Registration](#) for the conference is now open.

### Keynote Session

**Jeff Bender**, Director of the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center will kick off our keynote session. Dr. Bender has degrees in both veterinary medicine and public health and is well qualified to discuss One Health concepts, looking at the links between human, animal and environmental health. The keynote address will be followed by a panel representing a variety of related perspectives. *Panel members include Matt Nonnenmann from the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Glenda Dvorak from Iowa State University's Center for Food Security and Public Health and Jennifer Meece from the National Farm Medicine Center's "Tick Inventory via Citizen Science" (TICS) Project. Megan Hartwig from the Iowa Cancer Consortium will facilitate this session.* One of the objectives of the morning is to explore expanding partnerships to work together effectively on One Health cross-disciplinary solutions.



The popular mini-workshops will be included again this year, rebranded as "Cultivating Conversations."

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### Cultivating Conversations

This is the rebranded title of the "Messaging in Minutes" mini-workshops that were so popular at last year's conference. Participants will rotate through 4 topics of their choice to investigate during rapid 20-minute hands-on sessions in small discussion groups. Examples of topics to be covered include citizen science, vector signs, emergency risk and preparedness, mental wellness, H5 in backyard poultry, multifactor causes of cancer, and cancer screenings.

### Mental Wellness Session

Have you experienced stress this year? Another component of the conference will lead participants through a wide range of activities and programs designed to be used by individuals, peer-to-peer, or in trainings to promote mental wellness. Opportunities to discuss the details on many of the projects and programs will be available during the poster reception that will close out the first day of the conference.

## Director's Message

by Rich Gassman, MS

It's hard to believe that summer is in the rear-view mirror and fall is just around the corner. I-CASH had a busy summer providing outreach materials at several events. In May, I had the opportunity to visit with elementary school students at the Grinnell Ag Safety Day. In June we had a display at the Iowa Association of Ag Educators Conference in Ankeny, and in July we were at the Iowa Women in Agriculture Conference in Ankeny and the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines (see story on page 3).

As we enter the fall season, it's a time to reflect on the amazing season we just had and the wonders of the growing season. Fall is also a time to revisit your safety plan, and if you do not have one in place, to create one. Having a safety plan allows you to be prepared in the event of an emergency and can help bring you piece of mind. Make sure to communicate your safety plan to all family members and employees.



Rich Gassman, MS

As we look back on the year, the I-CASH team was very active and provided ag safety and health resources and information in many different channels. We are thankful to have been able to connect with so many people:

- Over 1600 households were reached each quarter with the Alive and Well newsletter.
- More than 31,000 ag health and safety resources were distributed statewide.
- Sixty-two mental health providers were trained on common stressors in agriculture and how to engage with the farm community.
- Ten grants were awarded to Iowa youth groups for projects to reach 995 farmers and 1350 rural youth with agricultural safety information.
- Eighty-seven participants from 10 states and Canada joined us at the 2024 MRASH Conference.
- More than 20 public presentations, trainings and educational displays were provided on topics including stress and mental health, agricultural digging, chemical storage, mowing safety, needlestick injury prevention, tractor and combine fires, radon, and Iowa agriculture.
- Six Safety Watch columns were written for *Iowa Farmer Today*, reaching nearly 58,000 households in print and distributed online through AgUpdate.com, reaching over 120,000 visitors per month.
- Prevention materials were provided to all ISU Extension and Farm Service Agency county offices.

I-CASH has had some recent personnel changes. Tabitha Kuehn has taken another job; we will miss her hard work and dedication but wish her the best of luck in her new role. We are excited to welcome Kim McMichael as the new Outreach Coordinator, with her experience in ag safety and health she is a great addition to the team. Kay Mohling announced her retirement at the end of May. Fortunately, we convinced her to come back on a part time basis and continue her amazing work on the annual report, calendar, and newsletters.

Rich Gassman  
I-CASH Director

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The University of Iowa ■ Iowa State University  
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Iowa Department of Public Health ■ Non-profits for Farm Health

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## I-CASH Summer Outreach Events

by Kim McMichael, BS, I-CASH Outreach Coordinator

Summer is a great time to build connections with the rural and agricultural communities, whether at fairs, conferences, or community outreach events. I-CASH staff continued to disseminate agricultural safety & health materials this summer at the Ag Safety Day at Key Cooperative Agronomy Center in Grinnell, the Iowa Women in Ag (IWIA) Conference in Ankeny, and the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines.



IWIA President Cheryl Tevis with I-CASH staff members Kim McMichael and Gayle Olson at the Iowa Women in Ag Conference.

Our most recent seasonal campaign, highlighting the effects of whole-body vibration and providing prevention strategies, peaked a lot of interest from the public. Discussions with farmers and extension workers provided helpful insights on topics that are at the top of farmer's minds, along with suggestions on how we can continue to provide relevant materials to Iowa's agricultural

population. We are looking forward to continuing to engage in these conversations at future events!



I-CASH Director Rich Gassman and Outreach Coordinator Kim McMichael at the Iowa State Fair.



I-CASH Director Rich Gassman with students at the Grinnell Ag Safety Day.

### Mark Your Calendars for National Farm Safety & Health Week - September 21 - 27, 2025

#### ***Safety First, Avoid the Worst***

Each year the third week of September is recognized as National Farm Safety and Health Week. The theme for this year's annual promotion is *Safety First, Avoid the Worst*. Each day of the week has its own focus and the AgriSafe Network is hosting free webinars to coincide with the daily topics.

- Monday, September 22 - Equipment and Rural Roadway Safety
- Tuesday, September 23 - Health and Wellness
- Wednesday, September 24 - Generations of Farming
- Thursday, September 25 - Confined Spaces
- Friday, September 26 - ATV/UTV

Visit the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS) [website](#) for more information, and register for the AgriSafe webinars [here](#).



## Great Plains Center Summer 2025 Events

by Marsha Cheyney, MPH, GPCAH Evaluation and Outreach Coordinator

### Grinnell Ag Safety Day – Key Cooperative Agronomy Center – Grinnell, IA (May 27)

Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health (GPCAH) Outreach staff presented our Safety Signs curriculum to 225 students from Davis Elementary School. Safety Signs teaches youth the meaning of the pictures (pictograms) included in warning messages on agricultural equipment and products used on the farm. This knowledge is important when the words on the label are unreadable due to distance, scuffing, or reading level. Coincidentally, at our table's location, we had a real-life example of how this knowledge would be useful to them – high overhead, there was a warning label telling us not to walk under a forklift when it was in the lifted position. It was too far away for any of us to read, but by identifying the image, we were able to understand the message. Once each image was identified, we discussed where that warning sign might appear on the farm and what youth should do when they encountered those signs (which ranged from “don't touch” to “leave the area immediately”).



Marsha Cheyney assists a child in choosing PPE and clothing for the “Flat Farmer” at the Minnesota Farmfest.

### Ag Safety Day, National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS) – Peosta, IA (June 6, July 9)

GPCAH Outreach staff presented sun safety lessons to over 125 students (elementary and high school) and adults at the June Ag Safety Day hosted by NECAS. We used a Sun Safety Jeopardy (youth edition) game board to present the basic concepts of sun safety in a game-show format. Although the youth were familiar with most of the basic concepts (use sunscreen, wear hat/sunglasses/sun safe clothing, take breaks in the shade to cool down), they remain less confident about specific details like identifying the “peak hours” when the sun's rays are strongest and protection is most needed, and how often to reapply sunscreen. Likewise, questions about skin cancer were too advanced for the younger participants. The youth enjoyed the game-based curriculum, and even the adults said they learned something!

### Minnesota Farmfest – Redwood Falls, MN (August 5-7)

GPCAH Outreach staff participated in the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health (UMASH) Safety & Wellness Pavilion at the 2025 Minnesota Farmfest. We presented information on sun safety and PPE selection as part of a Progressive Ag Foundation “Safety Zone”, in collaboration with our colleagues at the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (CS-CASH), Minnesota Extension, and Minnesota State Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence. GPCAH focused on sun safety and PPE selection, having participants dress the “Flat Farmers” for chores and recreational activities outdoors “on a day like today” (warm and breezy for Day 1, hot and humid for Day 2 and Day 3). Participants consistently chose sunscreen as something the Flat Farmers needed, but remained inconsistent in their knowledge about time for reapplication when working outside. When ATV tasks came up, youth almost always chose a helmet as the first thing our farmers needed to wear. Other topics covered in the Safety Zone were ATV/UTV safety, hearing loss prevention, PTO safety, grain bin safety, and hazard identification on a model farm. We shared health and safety information with an estimated 1000 people over the course of the three days, and received several requests for the Flat Farmers in larger sizes than currently available on our website, so we'll be working on making that happen this fall! On the last day of the show, approximately 30 commercial manure applicators completed their annual training by visiting our booth, where we demonstrated bump testing for H<sub>2</sub>S and multi-gas monitors, and discussed the logistics of adding gas monitors to the PPE they use when agitating or pumping manure. Many of the trainees were familiar and/or used gas monitors, which was a marked improvement from previous years, when only those who served on volunteer fire departments were aware of them.

Visit [GPCAH.org](https://www.gpcah.org) for educational resources, course offerings, and outreach materials for promoting agricultural health and safety.

# “You Don’t Want to See Your Kids Fail”: The Role of Parents in Teaching Farm Safety to Adolescents

by Anna Proctor, PhD, MS, Department of Occupational and Environmental Health, University of Iowa College of Public Health

Youth remain at elevated risk for injuries and fatalities on farms, particularly on family farms where the boundaries between home and workplace are blurred. While this is an ongoing public health issue, it is especially important in the Midwest, where over half of such incidents occur. Agricultural hazards (e.g., machinery, extreme weather, heavy equipment) can be dangerous to all farm workers, but youth are especially vulnerable due to their smaller stature, reduced strength, and limited maturity. Although farming hazards are well-documented, youth behavior on farms, particularly how they interact with these hazards and the most effective strategies for delivering safety training, remains poorly understood.



Photo courtesy of Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

To explore this gap, researchers from the University of Iowa (Drs. Anna Proctor, Diane Rohlman, Elizabeth O’Neal, Ebonee Johnson, and Carri Casteel) conducted a qualitative study with 15 parent-youth (adolescent) pairs living and working on family farms in southeastern Iowa.

We found that most parent-youth pairs agreed on general safety practices and felt confident in their ability to avoid injuries by following established rules. However, many did not believe they or their child were at risk of injury on the farm, making them unlikely to implement additional safety measures, and most admitted they did not consistently follow all safety rules. Parents typically taught their children through modeling (demonstrating tasks), giving instructions, and, rarely, direct supervision. Many parents shared that they took pride in teaching farm safety differently than their own parents had.

“My dad was a pretty blunt individual... he taught me farm safety about as blunt as blunt can be... I take pride knowing that I teach farm safety completely opposite than how my dad taught me... You don’t want to see your kids fail.” — Parent 9

Communication was identified as key to staying safe, with many youth reporting that they asked questions while learning farm safety. A disconnect emerged in several pairs regarding the time dedicated to safety education: youth often felt rushed, while parents believed they were teaching at a reasonable pace. Although youth did not express a desire for more time directly, many reported voicing safety concerns (e.g., being assigned to complete a farm task that made them nervous) to their parents, which was an unexpected finding that contrasts with previous research suggesting young workers rarely speak up to supervisors, particularly when those supervisors are family members. This study revealed that farm parents are communicating with their children about safety, and youth are actively participating in those conversations. Based on these findings, we recommend that farm parents slow the pace of safety instruction and provide more supervision to their youth, especially as the youth completes new tasks, to support open communication and foundational learning.

For more information contact Dr. Anna Proctor at [anna-proctor@uiowa.edu](mailto:anna-proctor@uiowa.edu).

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## FarmSafe Podcast: It's Time to Binge Season 4, Bundles Now Available

by Jenn Patterson, MLitt, GPCAH Center Coordinator



Thanks for listening to the FarmSafe Podcast, a podcast where we talk with ag workers and public health experts about making farming safer and healthier for farmers and their communities.

Based on the data and feedback we've received during our first three seasons we discovered you wanted to binge listen! Consequently, Season 4 is now available in seasonal "bundles" of episodes, so you no longer have to wait for the next episode to drop.

Libby Ritchie, our podcast's host, talks with several experts about important topics, including:

- Childcare
- Fire safety
- Rabies
- Falls
- Bird Flu
- Automated vehicles
- First aid
- Tips for teaching youth about farm safety and health

What are you waiting for? Grab your headphones and be sure to share [FarmSafe](#) with your friends and family. We need new listeners in West Virginia and Rhode Island to achieve our goal of reaching all 50 states. If you know anyone in West Virginia and Rhode Island who farms, please share FarmSafe with them.

*MRASH continued from page 1*

### Poster Abstracts Due October 10

We are accepting [abstracts for posters](#) until October 10. The poster reception is a wonderful time to learn about new research and outreach projects related to agricultural safety and health. Just as importantly, it is an opportunity for networking with colleagues, enjoying tasty local food and relaxing to good music at the beautiful Hotel Millwright.

### Friday Breakout Sessions and Award Luncheon

On Friday morning, attendees will be able to learn from coworkers across the Midwest in three tracks of breakout presentations. These sessions will cover research and outreach topics ranging from occupational respiratory exposures, parental safety information, ATV safety, and stress. The conference will close with an awards luncheon recognizing the top I-CASH Agricultural Youth Grant recipient.

**Registration is now available** on the [MRASH Conference website](#). Costs will be the same as last year: \$175 for both days with a discounted rate of \$100 for students and farmers. The discount is only available because of the generosity of our sponsors and exhibitors. The sign-up for exhibit tables for your organization will also be available through the registration form. [Hotel reservations](#) can be made via the link on the MRASH website or by calling the hotel. The hotel conference rate of \$119 expires on October 12.

The 2025 MRASH Conference promises to be an energizing couple of days with some of the most dedicated and helpful colleagues you could ever find! Our menus will be planned around food from local farmers as much as possible and the Amana hospitality is second to none. Please join us, and if you have questions contact Gayle Olson ([gayle-olson@uiowa.edu](mailto:gayle-olson@uiowa.edu)).

## NEWS AND UPDATES

### REGISTER NOW - MRASH November 13-14



The 2025 Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference will be held November 13-14, at the [Hotel Millwright](#) in Amana, IA. The theme this year is “Cultivating Connections: Health, Safety & Wellness in Agriculture.” **Abstracts for posters will be accepted until October 10.** Visit the [conference website](#) for details and registration.

**Relationships Can Heal: Knowing the Farmer Client** is a continuing education program that provides an overview of agricultural practices in the Midwest to help inform providers about their agricultural clients’ work experience. Training sessions will be offered this fall in [Bettendorf](#) (October 16) and [Mason City](#) (October 30). For more information contact Demi Johnson at (641) 210-8631 or [demij@iastate.edu](mailto:demij@iastate.edu).

**Free online program for farm families caring for someone with dementia.** Farm life comes with unique challenges—especially when a loved one is living with memory loss. A new program, **Farm Families Coping with Dementia (FFCD)**, offers practical tools to improve safety and reduce caregiver stress. Developed by researchers at the University of Iowa and University of Illinois Chicago, FFCD is a free, 4-week Zoom-based program designed specifically for rural caregivers. Sessions run October 13 to November 3, and participants can earn up to \$50 for completing short surveys and an optional interview. **Who can join:** Adults 18+ caring for a family member with dementia who lives or works on a farm. **To learn more or sign up call (319) 384-3817.**

### AgrAbility National Training Workshop Encore Webinars 2025

Join AgrAbility for webinars from some of the most requested sessions of the 2025 in-person National Training Workshop. Each one-hour webinar begins at 2:00 p.m. CDT on the given Wednesday. Visit the [website](#) for more information.

## Upcoming Events

September 21-27

**National Farm Safety & Health Week**

September 30-October 3

**World Dairy Expo**

Madison, WI

October 3-5

**Ozark Fall Farmfest**

Springfield, MO

October 6-9

**Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) Online Conference**  
Virtual Event

October 20-22

**Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA) Summit**  
San Antonio, TX

October 29-November 1

**National FFA Convention & Expo**  
Indianapolis, IN

November 2-5

**American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting and Expo**  
Washington, DC

November 13-14

**Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference**  
Amana, IA

November 20

**National Rural Health Day**

December 9-11

**Nebraska Ag Expo**  
Lincoln, NE



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