



News from Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH) Volume 32, Issue 2 March 2026

2026 Agricultural Injury Prevention Youth Grants

by Kim McMichael, BS, I-CASH Outreach Coordinator

Each year, I-CASH provides funding for youth programs in Iowa to educate communities on farm safety and health. These grants encourage leadership, collaboration, and developing relationships between youth and their local agricultural community. This program has been providing support for youth organizations in Iowa since 1998 with projects in over 65 counties in the state. Health and safety topics from previous years include hearing protection, rural roadway safety, respiratory health, and ATV safety. Resources are often created by the kids and distributed, along with PPE, at county fairs, ag safety days, and to local farmers during harvest time.



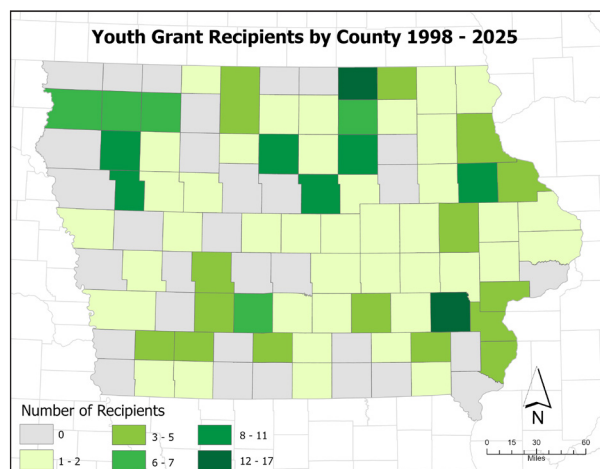
Washington County 4-H members packed and delivered “Stay Safe, Take a Break” resource bags for area farmers as part of their Youth Grant project in 2025.

In previous years, we have offered \$500 to each approved project. This year, with the help of the [CHS Foundation](#), we are excited to offer **\$800 to each project** for the 2026 period! We hope the additional funding will help each organization make a larger impact in the prevention of farm-related injuries in their community.

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Criteria for selection includes innovation, youth involvement, collaboration, use of funding, and number of people reached. Each year, after the final reports are reviewed, one group is chosen to receive the *Outstanding Youth Grant Award*. The winners will be announced at our annual Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference in November and they will receive a \$500 check to continue the project.



Applications are due April 17 and funding announcements will be made April 24. Visit the [I-CASH website](#) for more information.

Director's Message

by Rich Gassman, MS

As I write this message the “Blizzard of 2026” winds are howling outside my window. The ground is covered with a thick blanket of snow, resting and preparing for the arrival of spring. Spring is a time of hope, excitement, and anticipation of what is to come. As you conduct maintenance on your equipment this spring, make sure to take the time to maintain yourselves as well. Just as we need to feed and fuel our bodies, we also need to take care of our mental health. The I-CASH spring seasonal campaign will focus on mental health, providing resources that include our updated [Statewide Resources and Hotlines brochure](#) to all Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and USDA Farm Service Agency county offices in April.



Rich Gassman, MS

The I-CASH team has been busy with outreach activities and providing health and safety resources at several events. In December, I-CASH had a booth at the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach (ISUEO) Women in Ag Leadership Conference in Ames, and at the Integrated Crop Management Conference in Altoona. Kim McMichael, I-CASH Outreach Coordinator, was also part of the Agriculture Safety and Health panel at the ISUEO Women in Ag Leadership Conference. In January we had a booth at the Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) Annual Conference, providing more opportunities to build new connections and network with producers and organizations. On January 15th Gayle Olson was the featured presenter for the Iowa Farmers Union “Lunch and Learn” session and discussed the current challenges farmers are facing and I-CASH resources available. The Midwest Ag Safety Leadership Conference was held in Omaha on February 3-5 and we welcomed approximately 150 visitors to our booth. In March we provided resources and participated in initial planning discussions at the “Healing from the Ground Up: Iowa Summit.”

The “Relationships Can Heal” program, a joint project between ISUEO and I-CASH that provides training for healthcare and mental health professionals, continues to be very popular. During the course participants are instructed on the intricacies of working with rural populations. Trainings were held in Bettendorf and Mason City last fall and will be held this spring in Council Bluffs on April 16th and in Cedar Rapids on April 23rd. Email richard-gassman@uiowa.edu if you are interested in participating.

As we head into the busy spring season take a minute and remember to take care of yourself. I-CASH is a great resource that is here for all of you. Please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions.

Rich Gassman
I-CASH Director

Rich Gassman directs I-CASH, housed in the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health of the College of Public Health. He can be reached at 319/467-0327 (richard-gassman@uiowa.edu).

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/IaCenterAgSafetyHealth


I-CASH | Iowa's Center for
Agricultural Safety and Health

The University of Iowa ■ Iowa State University
Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
Iowa Department of Public Health ■ Non-profits for Farm Health

www.i-cash.org

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Youth working on the farm

by Kim McMichael, BS, I-CASH Outreach Coordinator

Agriculture is an important part of the Midwest economy and culture, and many children grow up on the farm, live in a rural farming community, or detassel to make money in the summer. While there are benefits of living and working in agriculture, there are also risks present for anyone on the farm, especially children and teenagers. Many agricultural work-related injuries and deaths are associated with children doing work that does not match their developmental level. Some of the top causes of injuries and fatalities are machinery, motor vehicles/ATVs, falls, and animals.



Photo courtesy of Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

We often consider children as “miniature adults”, but it is important to remember that children are both mentally and physically developing, and continue to develop even into their early 20s. Each child develops differently, which means that it may not be best to determine appropriate farm tasks only by age. For example, one 16-year-old may be cautious and responsible, while the next could be more of a risk-taker or have a shorter attention span.

When assigning work to youth, in addition to looking at the requirements of the task, the youth’s personality, work style, and ability should also be assessed. Youth characteristics to consider when working on the farm include impulsivity, lack of experience or knowledge, risk-taking behavior, limited sense of vulnerability to injury, and a desire to “prove” themselves. Be sure to clearly assign specific duties based on the individual’s abilities and assign supervisors who work well with youth, are consistent, and are good role models. Supervisors will want to create an atmosphere that encourages questions; provides feedback; has rules that are known, understood, and obeyed; and that trains youth to recognize and address risks and hazards. Modeling safe behavior is an important aspect to teaching and supervising teens. They may copy what adults do, rather than following verbal instructions given.

When training youth to perform a task, explain the task and demonstrate how to do it. After this, ask youth to repeat the instructions and watch them complete the task. Be sure to praise success, correct mistakes and answer all questions. Youth should be supervised closely until they are proficient in the task. Training should also be given periodically for review, and when something new is introduced.

Additionally, providing a safe workplace that identifies hazards and offers personal protective equipment (PPE) will benefit all employees, including youth. Employing protective strategies and providing PPE equipment reduces the risk of injuries. PPE may not fit a child the same way it would an adult, so ensuring a proper fit and providing signs displaying information on proper use is critical. Signs can be posted to detail procedures, designate areas where children are not allowed, educate on hazards, or to indicate that PPE is required.

Even if a farm has a comprehensive safety strategy, there is always a possibility of a serious injury or emergency. Planning for emergencies and developing written policies and procedures will help ensure that all workers know their roles in the event of an emergency.

A helpful resource in assessing youth’s abilities and reducing the risk of injury is the *Hired Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines*. These guidelines are available on the I-CASH website: <https://icash.public-health.uiowa.edu/summer-2024-hiring-youth-workers/> and on Cultivate Safety’s website, <https://cultivatesafety.org/resource-search/>. This resource provides detailed information about training youth, assigning tasks, and how to create a safe and rewarding work environment for youth on the farm.

Save the Date

MRASH 2026 | November 12-13, 2026
Hotel Millwright, Amana, Iowa

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



**Midwest Rural Agricultural
Safety and Health Conference**

November 12-13, 2026
Hotel Millwright, Amana, Iowa

The Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health Conference (MRASH) for 2026 will do something it hasn't done for a long time – be in the same location a second year! The response from participants at last year's conference was that they loved the location, the facilities and the food, and suggested they would like a repeat. Hotel Millwright came back with a great proposal for us so we will again be enjoying the hospitality that Amana, Iowa has to offer. Please put MRASH 2026 on your calendar at Hotel Millwright on November 12-13, 2026.

The theme and program are still being planned but will include many of our regular features – a keynote theme, general sessions with activities and panels, poster reception, concurrent breakout sessions, and awarding of I-CASH's Outstanding Youth Grant. We will begin collecting abstracts for posters and breakout sessions later this spring, so be thinking about outreach projects or research that you would like to share with our conference participants. The year 2026 has been declared the "International Year of Women Farmers" by the United Nations, and we will be including a celebration in some aspect of the conference.

MRASH provides a friendly and interdisciplinary forum for people to connect to support each other and share resources, information and goals. We heard from one researcher this month about receiving funding for a collaborative research project as a direct result of input from an MRASH farmer panel, and organizational relationships that they were able to build at the prior year's conference. Perhaps one of the best compliments ever came from our hotel contact last year – "It is so obvious how you all care about each other. That attitude is contagious and spread to our staff." Come be one of our conference colleagues spreading the light!

FarmSafe Podcast Season 5 is now available

Whether you've been listening to our Farm-Safe Podcast since the very beginning, or you're new to our health and safety podcast, you can now listen to Season 5 at <https://gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/farmsafe/>.

Previous episodes from Seasons 1-4 are also available on the [website](#). Listen to ag workers and public health experts share first-hand stories and real-life tips for making safer and healthier decisions on the farm.

SEASON 5

January Bundle of New Episodes

WINTER EPISODES

January 28, 2026

- Ep. 01 - *A New Chapter: Season 5 of the FarmSafe Podcast*, with Renee Anthony & Libby Ritchie
- Ep. 02 - *Pediatric Injury Prevention: A Focus on Rural Communities*, with Jenna Gibbs, Lauren Lavin, & Libby Ritchie
- Ep. 03 - *The Mechanics of Injury: Understanding Hazards of Farm Equipment*, with Renee Anthony
- Ep. 04 - *How Farmers Get Hurt: Insights from Iowa's Trauma Registry*, with Jon Davis & Renee Anthony
- Ep. 05 - *The 40 Percent Problem: Heart Health in Rural America*, with Tim Nikolai

Farm Safe
GPCAH.ORG



New initiatives for improving rural health

by Mandy Archer, BA, GPCAH Outreach Specialist

February was American Heart Month. It is not only harder to access heart healthy foods and maintain exercise in the country, but statistics show that rural communities are impacted harder by heart disease and stroke. Our team spoke to Tim Nikolai for a [podcast episode](#) and also for a *Safety Watch* article on the topic, which you can read at <https://gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/KR-SafetyWatch-1-18-26.pdf>. He said that the American Heart Association has been working on exciting innovations to bring heart health screenings, education, and training to rural areas. He also offered some creative ways to stay healthy on your own, including limiting sugars and high



sodium foods, or purchasing frozen fruit and vegetables if you are far away from a store. Get CPR and AED trained if you haven't been, so that you can join a "Nation of Lifesavers" ready to take action in your local community. Make sure to listen or read about the American Heart Association's rural initiatives and their work utilizing churches and libraries to offer rural health care.

Healing From the Ground Up: Iowa Summit

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

On March 2-3, the [University of Northern Iowa's Center for Energy and Environmental Education](#) (UNI-CEEE) and the [Iowa Food System Coalition](#) (IFSC) hosted the conference "Healing From the Ground Up: Iowa Summit" examining the intersection of healthy soils, healthy food and healthy people, including healthy farmers. Rich



Gassman and Gayle Olson both attended the conference which was modeled after a very successful event in Illinois by the same name in 2025. The first day of the Iowa conference focused on learning from a wide range of panelists who described what contributes to healthy soils and why that is important in growing and distributing food and how that keeps Iowans healthy. Speakers represented farmers, soil scientists, dieticians, physicians, public health, local food organizations, policy makers and others. The second day was spent discussing a vision for Iowa that better connects all the components. Small groups looked at farmer well-being, policy making, food as medicine, and other topics, then considered cross-cutting goals and next steps. One of the most important outcomes of the conference is to build a strong coalition that drives systems level change among professional stakeholders while bridging critical knowledge gaps. Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health is pleased to represent farmer health and safety needs as this coalition moves forward.

GPCAH Pilot Programs Announce RFA for Academic and Community-Track Awards

by Jenn Patterson, MLitt, GPCAH Center Coordinator

The Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health (GPCAH) Pilot Program offers two funding tracks (see below) and supports both community-based organizations and academic researchers, especially new investigators and trainees, and encourages applications from those newly interested in agricultural health and safety research. We support research projects that address occupational hazards relevant to farmers and farm workers in our nine-state region (IA, IL, IN, KS, NE, MO, MN, OH, & WI). Each project may be funded up to **\$30,000** (direct costs). Proposals addressing mental health, chemical safety, equipment/tool safety, and prevention of slips, trips, and falls are especially encouraged in the 2026 application cycle. However, any topic of relevance to the [GPCAH mission](#) and/or NIOSH priority goals for the [Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing industry sector](#) is welcome.

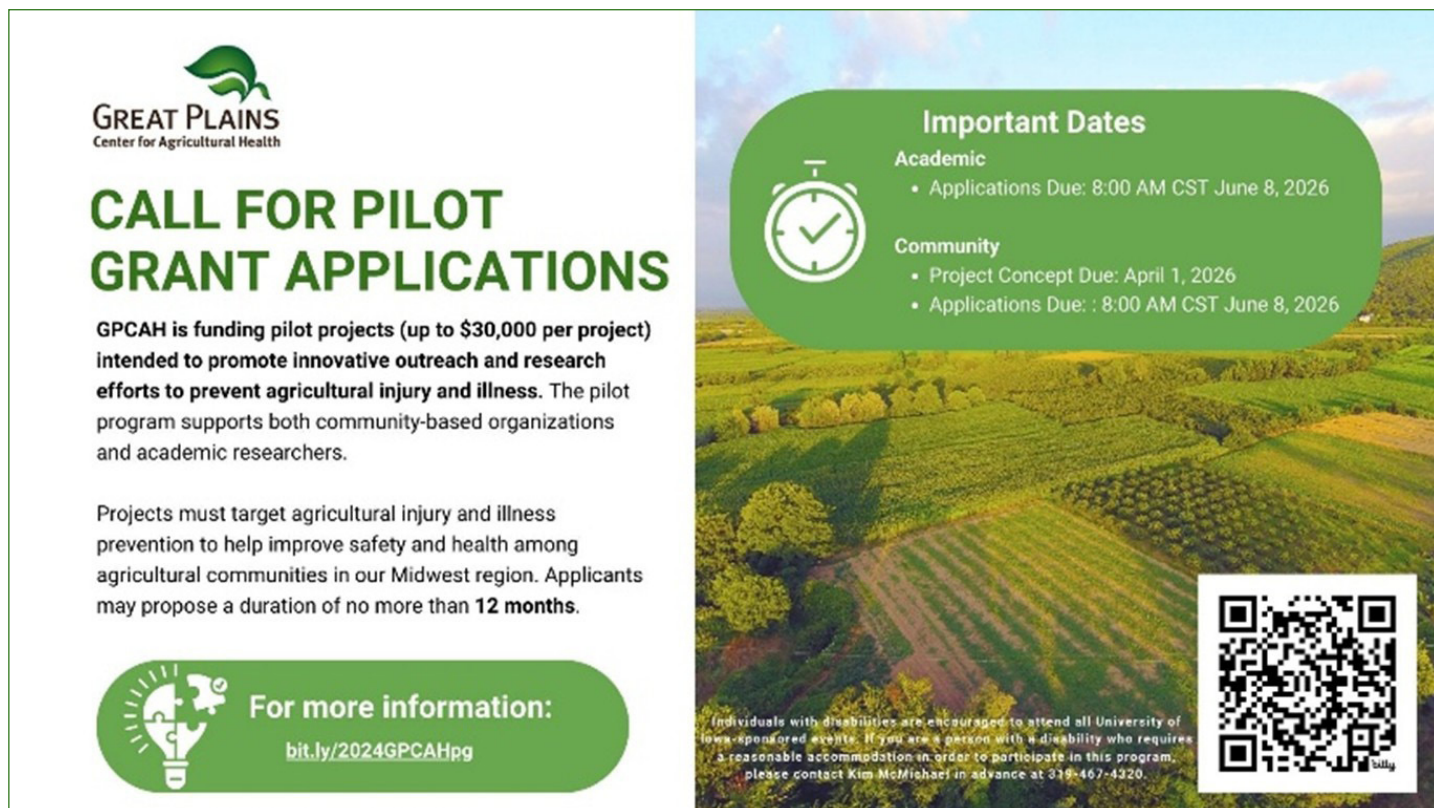
Academic/scholarly research pilot grants

Potential recipients include **students, staff, and faculty of academic institutions** who are creating new agricultural safety and health knowledge and/or assessing and promoting best safety and health practices. Basic and applied research projects will be reviewed for scientific merit. **Proposals are due at 8 AM CST on June 8, 2026.** [Learn more and view the Academic Track Request for Proposals \(RFP\) here.](#)

Community outreach/education pilot grants

Potential grantees are typically staff members of community-based entities who will develop and deliver evidence-based agricultural health outreach programs. Projects will be reviewed for feasibility, impact, and ability to test innovative outreach/education methods. **Project concepts are due on April 1, 2026. Proposals are due at 8 AM CST on June 8, 2026.** [Learn more and view the Community Track Request for Proposals \(RFP\) here.](#)

Thank you for your help and please reach out to me at jennifer-j-patterson@uiowa.edu with any questions!



The poster is a call for pilot grant applications. It features the GPCAH logo at the top left, which includes a green leaf icon and the text "GREAT PLAINS Center for Agricultural Health". Below the logo, the main heading reads "CALL FOR PILOT GRANT APPLICATIONS" in large, bold, green letters. Underneath, a paragraph states: "GPCAH is funding pilot projects (up to \$30,000 per project) intended to promote innovative outreach and research efforts to prevent agricultural injury and illness. The pilot program supports both community-based organizations and academic researchers." A second paragraph follows: "Projects must target agricultural injury and illness prevention to help improve safety and health among agricultural communities in our Midwest region. Applicants may propose a duration of no more than 12 months." At the bottom left, there is a green rounded rectangle containing a lightbulb icon with a gear inside, and the text "For more information: bit.ly/2024GPCAHpg". On the right side of the poster, there is a green rounded rectangle titled "Important Dates" with a clock icon. It lists two categories: "Academic" with a bullet point "Applications Due: 8:00 AM CST June 8, 2026" and "Community" with two bullet points: "Project Concept Due: April 1, 2026" and "Applications Due: 8:00 AM CST June 8, 2026". At the bottom right, there is a QR code. A small disclaimer at the very bottom of the poster reads: "Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to attend all University of Iowa-sponsored events. If you are a person with a disability who requires a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this program, please contact Kim McMichael in advance at 319-467-4220."

GPCAH 2025 Pilot Grant Recipients

**Taeuk Kang, PhD Student, Department of Epidemiology,
University of Iowa, College of Public Health**
taeuk-kang@uiowa.edu



Taeuk Kang

Title: Fungal Keratitis in Rural Iowa: Agricultural Risk, Clinical Impact, and Genomic Insights From a 15-Year Retrospective Study

Project Summary: Fungal keratitis (FK) is a serious eye infection that often causes visual impairment or blindness despite treatment. In the United States, approximately 6% of one million annual keratitis cases are fungal. Rural communities and agricultural workers face disproportionate risk due to corneal injuries from fungus-contaminated plant debris. However, FK remains under recognized in agricultural states like Iowa. This pilot project will retrospectively analyze 15 years (2009–2024) of FK cases at the University of Iowa Health Care (UIHC) to characterize epidemiology, clinical implications, antifungal susceptibility testing (AfST) results, and fungal species involved. This project includes whole genome sequencing (WGS) of Iowa FK isolates for comparison with strains from other regions. As FK characteristics have never been correlated with WGS and clinical implications, this study anticipates contributing to improved diagnosis and optimal treatment for Iowans, particularly farmers and rural residents, thereby enhancing agricultural safety and rural health.

**Srividya Ramanathan, PhD Student, Department of Health
Management and Policy**
University of Iowa, College of Public Health
srividya-ramanathan@uiowa.edu



Srividya Ramanathan

Title: Evaluating the Early Impact of Designating Emergency Medical Services (EMS) as an Essential Service on Trauma Care Outcomes among Farm Injuries in Iowa

Abstract: The proposed pilot study will examine the early effects of Iowa's 2021 EMS essential service legislation on trauma care outcomes among farm injury patients using the Iowa State Trauma Registry (ISTR). The results of this study will provide empirical evidence on how strengthening EMS systems through local essential service designations impact emergency response and care delivery for farm-related injuries.

NEWS AND UPDATES



Save the Date

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Diane Rohlman was recently honored with the 2025 Agricultural Safety & Health Council of America (ASHCA) Achievement Award for her substantial contributions to the field of agricultural safety and health. Rohlman is a professor and endowed chair in rural safety and health, associate dean for faculty affairs in the University of Iowa College of Public Health, and I-CASH Advisory Board member. Throughout her career Rohlman has engaged in research to identify, characterize, and prevent occupational and environmental illness and injury in high-risk populations among agricultural workers in the U.S. and abroad.

Relationships Can Heal: Knowing the Farmer Client courses will be held in [Council Bluffs](#) on April 16 and [Cedar Rapids](#) on April 23. The training provides an overview of Midwest agricultural practices for healthcare and mental health providers. Contact richard-gassman@uiowa.edu for more information.

Caroline Powell, MS student in agricultural safety and health was named to the University of Iowa **“Dare to Discover”** campaign. Powell studies cancer awareness in Iowa’s agricultural communities, focusing on what people living and working in these settings know and believe about cancer development, risk factors, and prevention behaviors. Powell was a presenter at the 2024 and 2025 Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health (MRASH) Conference.

Upcoming Events

March 30 - April 3

Stand Up 4 Grain Safety Week

April 8-9

Public Health Conference of Iowa
Des Moines, IA

April 15-17

**National Center for Farmworker Health
Agricultural Worker Spring Symposium**
New Orleans, LA

April 19-21

Iowa FFA Leadership Conference
Ames, IA

May 19-20

NRHA Annual Rural Health Conference
San Diego, CA

June 15-18

**Safety and Health in Agricultural
and Rural Populations (SHARP)
Symposium**
Saskatoon, SK, Canada

July 7-10

**Agricultural Health and Safety Course
for Medical and Safety Professionals**
Omaha, NE

July 12-15

ASABE Annual International Meeting
Indianapolis, IN

August 5-6

Iowa Women in Agriculture Conference
Ankeny, IA

September 1-3

Farm Progress Show
Boone, IA

November 12-13

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



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