

Episode Title: Tips from Farm Youth Educators

Topic: Youth Outreach

Summary: Jana Davidson, program manager for the Progressive Agriculture Foundation, and Marsha Cheyney, outreach specialist for the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, discuss their strategies for agricultural safety outreach programs. Davidson stresses the importance of evaluating ROI and aligning activities with their mission of creating safer and healthier rural communities.

Cheyney, representing the regional Great Plains Center, describes a similar but regionally focused approach. Like Davidson, she stresses the importance of collaborative work across organizations to reach a broader audience and recognizes the importance of communicating effectively with different age ranges in the community and ensuring both immediate and long-term learning opportunities.

Expert: Marsha Cheyney, Jana Davidson

Episode Quote:

“If they’re going to have a takeaway, how can we continue that education once they go home? Can you have something that, an item that is fun, but also has the educational component?”

– Jana Davidson

Transcript

00:10 E Ritchie

Welcome to the *FarmSafe* Podcast brought to you by the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health. In the blink of an eye, an injury can change your life and your farm forever. During each episode, we share first-hand stories and real-life tips for making safer and healthier decisions while on the farm.

E Ritchie

Joining us today is Jana Davidson, Program Manager for the Progressive Agriculture Foundation, and Marsha Cheyney, Outreach Specialist with the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health.

In our conversation, we’ll explore how they tailor hands-on activities for different age groups, the importance of local partnerships, and why targeted, regional engagement is key to their success. You’ll also hear about how real-life incidents shape educational content and why communication and collaboration are at the heart of their outreach efforts.

Whether you're an educator, ag professional, or rural parent, there’s something here for everyone.

J Davidson

My name is Jana Davidson. I am the program manager for the Progressive Agriculture Foundation. We manage progressive agriculture safety day programs all throughout North America, which we're very proud to be recognized as I believe the largest rural safety and health education program for children. We have planned for more than 400 safety day programs here throughout 2025. And they all look a little different, by the topics that they offer, by the delivery mode. We have our traditional safety day events that happen at schools and communities. And we also have kind of something new we're rolling out here in the future called Safety Academy, which would be, I think, ideal for folks having a having our program, whether it's in a classroom or a club setting like a 4-H club setting or scouts and camps.

M Cheyney

Hi, I’m Marsha Cheyney. I have served as an outreach specialist for the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health for a little over 12 years now. My outreach roles have evolved a lot over the years, but I currently do a lot of in-person outreach – with youth at Ag safety days, with high schoolers at the National FFA convention, and with college students during safety trainings held at community colleges

in our region. When I'm not on the road, I design hands-on tools and games for my outreach work and help organize local and regional events and activities focused on Ag safety and health.

[FarmSafe Music]

E Ritchie

So, how do you decide or how do you choose which events you're going to do for outreach?

J Davidson

So, we do have an outreach and engagement administrator, Susan Turner. And so, she does a really good job of trying to identify places that we should be, we could be. That's something that has been a big change for our organization over the past 30 years, because we had been going places year after year, often we were going to the same places. And so, when she joined our team, we said, "what do we really need in our organization? How do we grow our program and discover new ways of where we should be going and how we should be communicating?"

J Davidson

We do keep consider or keep in mind is we do take a targeted growth approach and a targeted approach when it comes to like states and regions. So, just this recent year we've been kind of looking at the Southeast region of the US, trying to go to more statewide events rather than all the national events. And that could be, national FFA, summer conferences. That could be soil water conservation district meetings and conferences, 4-H meetings, Farm Bureau conferences. It's easier to introduce ourselves to maybe a smaller group so they get to know you better.

E Ritchie

And what about you, Marsha?

M Cheyney

It's a little bit different here because Great Plains Center is a regional center rather than a national organization like yours. When we first started doing this, I would look at our region and just see what was going on. And, I try to get to each of our states every two or three years or so, just so that we can listen to what the farmers and ranchers are experiencing in those areas. But normally, I choose events that occur within our region or national events that have an ag safety and health issue or audience that's relevant to what agriculture in this region is like. A third thing that we consider is if one of the other centers is going to a new show or event.

E Ritchie

So, once you've picked out an event to do, how do you decide or select topics and activities for that particular event or farm show?

J Davidson

We pull from our curriculum. So, we do have lesson plans, hands-on activities, demonstrations on more than 30 safety and health topics. We consider the audience. again, with us having that North American presence wherever we're traveling to, we think about what are the commodities that are important to that area or region and what's the agricultural climate look like.

And also consider the time of year that we're attending an event. What's the hot topic? What season are we in? So, if we're going like spring planting or fall harvest, that would be the best time to talk about things like tractor safety, PTO safety, underground utilities, things like that. And then also seeing what are the incidents what why are youth being injured or killed in those areas, that's definitely something that you want to address.

E Ritchie

What makes an activity effective for outreach?

M Cheyney

For activities, I try really hard to find a hands-on activity. People like to touch things. I think about competition. Older kids really get into the competitive thing. So, when we did our safety zone at Farm Progress Show this year, there's a huge competition on the grain tug of war.

J Davidson

Oh, yes. With us being an organization that really focuses on younger children—so, the elementary school age, four to 13—we love to work with the older teens because they make excellent presenters and volunteers at our program. It's how do you get that appealing, engaging prop or activity that you can really pull them in. And if you get the children to come over to your booth, likely mom and dad, grandparents, brothers, sisters are gonna follow and they're gonna learn as a family.

When you get them there, you have a variety of different ways you can educate individuals. You can talk to the children, have that safety message. Maybe you want to talk to that teen, that older brother or sister. Maybe they're in FFA or 4H and they're looking for an SAE project or community service projects for their club. Maybe you have their parent or grandparents' part of Farm Bureau and they're looking for that project to kind of hang their hat on and they want farm safety to be a component, and you can talk to them about what our program offers and how you can bring that to their community. So, you have several different messages to different groups, but that hands-on, that fun activity brings them all in.

M Cheyney

And I've also found that it's great to have a prize. If they know that there's a prize, they're going to get for coming in, a lot of times the kids would just flock to that. But even if you don't have a giveaway item, a prize wheel to spin is like this huge draw that I can't even explain sometimes.

J Davidson

And you also have to think about sometimes your location at these events that you're going to. Are you going to be indoors? Are you going to be outdoors? Because that does make a big difference.

E Ritchie

So, how do you map that message to the audience then? And you talked a little bit about that, but is there a strategy that you're thinking of in advance when you do it?

J Davidson

The whole fun, engaging hands-on is kind of the number one piece we think about when we're looking at that. And then how do we talk to different age children that come? So being age appropriate. We're probably gonna talk to a five-year-old, maybe a little different than a 12-year-old. 12-year-olds might be getting ready to start some tasks or already doing tasks around the farm. And so, you how do we talk to them about safety compared to maybe a five-year-old that shouldn't be doing things. If you have the opportunity to utilize teens, I know I mentioned that earlier about having them as volunteers because that peer-to-peer approach works so well. So, it's good for that teen too, because when they have to repeat that message over and over again, it sticks, but they're also really being a positive influence on that younger generation.

J Davidson

If they're going to have a takeaway, how can we continue that education once they go home? Can you have something that, an item that is fun, but also has the educational component? So, like the activity books, we've had them create the sun bead bracelets have been very popular. It has that purpose of, okay, when those beads change colors, it's time to put on your sunscreen.

E Ritchie

Have there been times where real-time events have affected your presentations?

M Cheyney

You have to think about how you're going to approach that topic a little bit differently when there's been a fatality or a traumatic injury in that area.

J Davidson

You are absolutely right. I remember it's been several years now, but my former colleague and I were at Husker Harvest Days in Nebraska. And we were just getting ready to leave our hotel to head over to the farm show. And down in the hotel lobby, there was a television on and it was talking about a young boy who was just killed in an ATV related incident. I think he was three or four, very young. And when we got there that day, of course, many of our props were related to ATV safety. We actually had the youth sized ATV that was donated by Polaris right in our booth. And this father actually came over, he had two young kids, and he came over and he's like, please talk to my kids. He's like, "my wife and I just saw this on the news this morning. We don't, we know that they're around ATVs. They do ride ATVs. Like, what can you tell us to keep us safe?" And so that was one more, was like very much invited because of the situation. But communities are small and a lot of people know each other and you don't want to kind of open up those wounds if they're so fresh and someone was just injured or killed.

E Ritchie

So, that kind of brings me to our last question. What lessons have you learned from doing this outreach? What kind of things would you share if you were trying to share information on how to do this outreach work with somebody who's new to it?

J Davidson

I do like to say with everything that we've talked about, outreach, it's a work in progress. There's so many lessons, you learned along the way and we're doing things completely different than we did three or four years ago. I do like to say with everything that we've talked about, outreach, it's a work in progress. There's so many lessons, you learned along the way and we're doing things completely different than we did three or four years ago. But now we're kind of taking a look, thinking about the ROI, what was the return on investment? Are we seeing more children educated?

J Davidson

We're keeping track now of how many kids visited our booth and how many adults we talked to and how much information we shared, who went home with a packet or a brochure, things like that. But I'd say, you know, we're always learning from events we attend. We're always striving to make our engagement better, our visibility better.

J Davidson

The other thing we try to do here at the foundation, and we've been very conscious of this lately is bringing everything back to our mission. So, our mission is to provide education, training and resources to make farm, ranch and rural life safer and healthier for children and their families and their rural communities. And so, everything we do, we think, does it tie to the mission?

Communicating and collaborating with others, having individuals like yourself. We wouldn't be able to do these safety zones at farm shows without individuals like yourselves and organizations that we work with to make it happen. So, we can kind of learn from each other. There's gonna be challenges along the way. We've all had them. Sometimes things are out of our control, but you just gotta roll with it, roll with the punches, think about what you can learn from that experience, how you can make it better in the future. Maybe it comes down to you do something different at your space or in your booth. Maybe it comes down to that's not the best fit for you and your organization, or it doesn't tie back to the goals of your mission, and you look at going somewhere else. Just as long as you're always trying to evaluate when you're done and come back to, you know. what you can do to make it better. That's just very important.

E Ritchie

How about you, Marsha? How do you kind of take into what you learn from your outreach efforts and apply it to the future?

M Cheyney

I liked what you said about communication and communicating with other people, other organizations that are like you. And that can look different, you know, but for me, if I'm going to an ag safety day or I'm going to be in a health and safety area, I want to know who

else is going to be there and what are they presenting about because sometimes things tie in, you know, and sometimes you don't have to hit that one topic so hard because somebody else already did it.

M Cheyney

At first, I went to shows and I was all by myself and I had my little 10 by 10 booth and it's hard to do that with all the people around you who are selling products and want you to want the people there to spend money. And what we're selling is a message. And it's just as important.

J Davidson

Exactly.

M Cheyney

What helped the most though was working with some of our partner centers here in Nebraska at CS-CASH and with the University of Minnesota, UMASH group. We got together when there were events that were in shared regions. And we would have a bigger booth that the three groups shared. And that was so much better for traffic flow, because there was room for people to move around. But also, you had a much broader message, with three different groups with something to say. Something in there appealed to just about everyone.

J Davidson

Definitely. I love that collaboration piece.

E Ritchie

That wraps up our conversation with Jana Davidson and Marsha Cheyney—two passionate advocates for agricultural safety who are making a difference in their communities and beyond.

From engaging kids with sun bead bracelets to developing games that emphasize important safety messages, their work shows that safety education is most powerful when it's hands-on, age-appropriate, and collaborative. As they both emphasized, creating healthier, safer rural communities means meeting people where they are—whether that's in a classroom, at a state fair, or on the farm.

E Ritchie

If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to share it with others in your network who care about the future of ag safety. For additional content on education and engagement with the agricultural community, check out episode 17 of Season 4, which focuses on educating the next generation of farmers and agricultural workers on health and safety by prioritizing engagement through interactive activities and demonstrations.

E Ritchie

To check out some of the activities the Great Plains Center has brought to farm shows and events to educate youth on health and safety topics, you can visit our website to view our outreach toolkits by clicking on the link provided in the resources under this episode. One of our most popular activities that we have brought to several farm shows and events is the Flat Farmers, a hands-on educational tool designed to teach people about PPE selection for common on-farm tasks. The link to our Flat Farmers toolkit has also been provided in the resources for this episode.

E Ritchie

Listen in on the *FarmSafe* podcast to join in on the conversation about keeping safe on the farm.

We want to hear from you. Share your stories about health and safety issues on the farm, about injuries that made you change the way you work, or about the ways you keep yourself and others safe on your farm. Also let us know if there's questions you have or topics that you want to hear about on the air. You can visit our website, gpcah.org, or email us.

Original music for the *FarmSafe* podcast was written and performed by Ben Schmidt.

This work was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health.

Episode Resources

- [GPCAH Outreach Toolkits](#)
- [GPCAH Flat Farmers Toolkit](#)

Photo

