

**Episode Title:** Teaching Safety to the Next Generation of Farmers

**Topic:** Youth Education

**Summary:** Carolyn Sheridan, Executive Director of the Ag Health and Safety Alliance, describes the Gear Up for Ag program focused on educating the next generation of farmers and agricultural workers on health and safety. The program, tailored for various age groups (youth, high school, college), prioritizes engagement through interactive activities and demonstrations.

**Expert:** Carolyn Sheridan, Executive Director of the Ag Health and Safety Alliance

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**Episode Quote:**

*“We also really feel strongly that we don't just teach, we need to make that connection. In making the connection, you also have to think about how it is you're going to do hands-on activities that helps make the connection. You watch your audience, you see who is it that would be willing to come up front.”*

– Carolyn Sheridan

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## Transcript

### 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

Our guest today is Carolyn Sheridan, Executive Director of the Ag Health and Safety Alliance—a driving force behind the Gear Up for Ag Program designed to teach the next generation of farmers and agricultural workers how to stay healthy and safe on the job. Carolyn will discuss how her team tailors their approach to meet students where they are.

In this episode, we'll explore how to tailor content to keep it relevant, how to structure time to keep sessions engaging, and the elements that create the ideal educational session for students.

### C Sheridan

Hi, I'm Carolyn Sheridan. I'm the executive director of Ag Health and Safety Alliance. And I've been working in agriculture as a registered nurse for the majority of my career. I live in Northwest Iowa, but I've been fortunate enough to be able to travel many places in North America and even abroad for some international programs. I've been working with youth throughout my career. Even the youngsters, the four- to seven-year-olds, smaller children or youth I would say, which would be the ones that are pre-teens and teens.

And I found out in my career and working with youth that I really did have a passion for helping the next generation of farmers, meaning they're the ones that have pretty much decided that this is a career. They may be an ag educator, they may be going into ag business, or they're going to be working on their family farms or for other farmers. So, we figured out that these students have a different appreciation for the need for health and safety. We have our gear for ag program, which really focuses on what we call that generation that's getting ready to be out there and have a hopefully a culture change in health and safety and agriculture.

### E Ritchie

And when working in academic programs, how do you structure your time, particularly to keep your students engaged?

### C Sheridan

Right so, engagement, we know in any kind of education is critical and keeping different generations engaged is different. So, when you're working within a college age group, and sometimes we've kind of did a little bit of a dive down into the high school students.

So, we think a little bit differently with those as well. What we know is we have to think about a couple of things. Our programs are structured on really four main things. The amount of time we have. We do a pre-survey. What does that survey tell us about our students?

### C Sheridan

We also have some engagement with our instructors too. What does the instructor think about the student? How are they to teach? Do we have some goofy kids? Do we have some serious kids? And what do they think that the actual really key things we need to focus on? And of course, emerging issues. So, we know that's always critical in deciding what you're going to teach. So as far as keeping students engaged or your audience engaged, demonstrations, interaction, asking them questions, letting them be involved, be willing to let the educational program take its own path occasionally. What are students acting like in the audience? What questions are they asking? Do they appear to be engaged and how are you going to move that along? Lots of demonstrations, lots of interaction. And my gosh, you gotta have some fun.

### E Ritchie

And what kind of hands-on activities do you walk students through?

### C Sheridan

So, we also really feel strongly that we don't just teach, we need to make that connection. So, in making the connection, you also have to think about how is it you're going to do hands-on activities that helps make the connection. You watch your audience, you see who is it that would be willing to come up front-

And our program, we really do line up a number of students in front, have them all have to try on a different type of respirator. We talk about assigned protection factor. Personal protective equipment, pesticides, donning and doffing, using your shaving cream demonstrations. There's a lot of discussions back and forth, some laughter. And then depending on the audience and what the emerging issues are, we might pull in some other interactive type of a demonstration.

### E Ritchie

And your organization has spent a lot of time developing animated short videos to help with training. What kind of benefits have you seen from using these?

### C Sheridan

I think we started our first motion graphic about five years ago, I believe, with an ATV motion graphic. ATV safety is kind of a tough topic because people and lots of people working on the farm use ATVs in recreation, but also in their farming activities. And so, it's hard to help them think about behavior change. You should be wearing a helmet. You should be not having extra riders. There's some safety features. There's a crush protection device. So even though we do a good job of educating, we provide them their survey information. We know what percentage of the students have rolled an ATV.

We do storytelling. When we added a short motion graphic that is less than two minutes with music, fun music, great graphics, and it tells the message, but it does it in a fun way. There's text, a little bit of voiceover. We saw an increase in the number of students who said that they remembered that. We do a post-it note activity afterwards and say, was the one thing, your one highlight, the one thing you're going to remember?

### C Sheridan

We saw an increase in the number of students who said ATV safety. So that indicated to us that adding a motion graphic, that perhaps people are gonna learn more. They're gonna remember it a little bit better. So, we've been fortunate enough to have the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health provide funding to add a series of videos. There are respiratory, and then there's personal protective equipment. There's a label is the law and gloves. So, now we're able to make an impact with motion graphics in addition or paired with our lecture format, our Prezi format, and our demonstrations.

### E Ritchie

Since you have been running these programs for a number of years, what would you say has worked and what hasn't worked?

### C Sheridan

I think that the things that haven't worked worked when they needed to. I also think that classes that are way too big, our optimum class we would say is anywhere between 15 and maybe 40 students. And when you move into the bigger groups, maybe the 75 to even upwards of 150, then you have less engagement. It's still doable. It still works. We still engage at a very high level. You really have to be engaged in many different ways. And it takes a kind of a small team to do that.

### C Sheridan

The other one that we figured out too is when they're too long. But we also don't want them to be too short. You get the two hour to three-hour mark is excellent because we've got time to engage. We've got time to make a connection. We've got time to get information across and we have time to wind back down and kind of finish the program off. So, we love the two-to-three-hour mark. If we get into the high school age, once again, that's not really where we spend much of our time. You have to take the smaller timeframe. The ability to stay focused is less, 45 minutes to an hour.

We have an eLearning component where when we leave, they have a lot of the great resources such as emotion graphics available to them. Instructors can assign topics into the eLearning. So, every student has access to that. The instructors have access to see how the students are doing, which ones are going in through their eLearning. We like to make the program flexible. Meet instructors figure out what they think their students need. Look at emerging issues, take a look at the survey and really create a customized program that fits the needs of the students that we're going to be meeting with.

### E Ritchie

What kinds of resources are available through your organization? Whether that's helping people in their work with students, whether it's resources that are available to students.

### C Sheridan

One thing I should mention about the program too is the ability to have a personal protective equipment that each student gets because then they're touching, feeling, as well as taking something home in their gear for personal protective equipment bag. So as far as resources, that's a resource that they get on site. That's something that takes extra funding. It takes interaction with ag centers such as the Great Plains Center who have certainly sponsored things such as that or other organizations to be able to support that. Aside from that, for resources, we have our e-learning platform that the students and instructors get.

On our website, we have all of our motion graphics. have any any resource that we use during the program is available on our website as well as in our e-learning. Depending on where we're traveling to, we certainly team up with other local resources. and so there's on site resources that we hand out. Mostly there's stuff we refer to online, and then there's stuff that gets tucked into that e-learning platform. So, it's all there and available to the students and instructors to have after we leave.

### E Ritchie

When teaching young or beginning farmers about ag safety and health, there are several key things to keep in mind that may be helpful when planning and structuring your educational sessions. Personalized surveys and real-time feedback shape age-appropriate safety training; Hands-on demonstrations—like PPE fittings and respirator use—truly engage students; animated micro-videos can boost retention of safety messages; and physical PPE is a practical and beneficial resource to provide during sessions.

### E Ritchie

If you found the information in this episode helpful, be sure to share this episode with anyone working in agriculture or education, specifically those who are teaching.

If you would like to explore the resources Carolyn mentioned, you can find the link to the Ag Health and Safety Alliance webpage under the resources for this episode, or you can visit [aghealthandsafety.com/resources](http://aghealthandsafety.com/resources).

### E Ritchie

The Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health resources webpage is a central hub for safety tools, audio units, posters, and more so you can help farmers learn, visualize, and apply farm safety practices. The main resources page lists key safety topics like grain entrapment, hearing loss, PPE, first aid and so much more – with each topic page providing an overview, other multi-media resources on the topic, printable PDFs or posters, and additional links with more information.

For those teaching ag safety and health to our younger farmers, we have a new resource called “*FarmSafe* in the Classroom – Resources for Ag Educators.” The *FarmSafe* in the Classroom project has developed classroom-ready activities that correspond to *FarmSafe* podcast episodes. Classroom assignments and activities map to Common Core and the National Council for Ag Educator’s Content Standards for AFNR programs. Visit this page to access episodes and activities, ranging from simple quizzes to interactive projects, to incorporate into curriculum for grades 6-12 or college. You can find the *FarmSafe* in the Classroom webpage by first going to “Educational Programs” on the resources page, or by visiting [gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/outreach-2/farmsafe-in-the-classroom/](http://gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/outreach-2/farmsafe-in-the-classroom/).

For downloadable visuals on air quality, gas monitors, grain hazards and more—click on “Posters for Ag Educators” under “Resources for Events and Partners.” These visuals are available to print in 11×17 or 8.5×11. Newer posters include links to the relevant Ag Health 101 units and *FarmSafe* episodes for more info and some also offer toolkits on topics like hearing loss, roadway safety, and gas monitor training—ideal for sharing with your teams or local ag community.

We will also include links to the resources just mentioned under 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](http://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

- [Ag Health and Safety Alliance Resource Webpage](#)
- [GPCAH Main Resources Webpage](#)
- [GPCAH FarmSafe in the Classroom](#)
- [GPCAH Ag Educator Posters](#)

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