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THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF AGRICULTURAL PROFESSIONALS ON HEALTH AND SAFETY CHANGES AMONG FARMERS

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Abstract

This workshop presents examples of program results and applications that indicate farmers are willing to purchase safety equipment and develop safer working practices. Many of these interventions for improving farmers' safety have been promoted and endorsed by the ag professionals who work directly with farmers. Case study examples show how ag professionals are playing a positive and active role towards improving the safety and health of Iowa's farm families.

Introduction

Concerns for farmers' safety and health have received increased attention and focus during the past 5 - 10 years. This has resulted in increased involvement by agricultural professionals in developing and sponsoring programs and activities for their farm family clients. Two years ago at this conference, I presented a workshop on "The Role and Responsibility of Ag Professionals in Promoting Farmers' Safety and Health." That workshop was developed since farmers reported that they expect and request farm safety services and information from their local farm chemical dealers. In one survey, farmers considered their chemical dealers to be the most important group involved in supporting and promoting farm safety in their community. That workshop examined the hazards in agriculture as well as provided ideas for safety programs and activities that ag professionals could implement that would be helpful to Iowa's farm families. Available resources and networks throughout the state were also identified.

In the time since then, many programs have been conducted around the state for promoting farm safety activities and for encouraging farmers to make changes. Based on the activities I see and the requests for information that I receive, I would like to use this workshop to inform you that your efforts are indeed having a positive effect. The case study examples can be used to provide further ideas for continued programming and solutions.

The objectives of this workshop are to:
1. recognize that farmers are developing positive attitudes towards their safety and health
2. realize that the efforts by agribusiness personnel can positively influence and impact farmers' safety and health
3. discuss examples of what agribusiness people have done to promote agricultural safety and health among Iowa's farm families
4. develop additional ideas for continuing to make a positive impact on farmers' safety and health.

Importance of Community Support

It is recognized that community-based support and participation are very important aspects for intervention program success. The issues of making positive behavioral changes in the area of
agricultural safety and health are more complex than just a matter of the "nuts and bolts" of putting on a few shields. Social issues to be considered for farmers' implementing corrections include:

1. peer pressure
2. cost of safety equipment
3. lack of incentive or reward system.

Peer pressure is a factor in the adoption of safety practices. For years, farming was recognized as a dangerous occupation, and the frequent comment by society was that this was accepted as a part of the cost of farming. Society now looks at this as being unacceptable and that corrections need to be made. It has now become socially acceptable to adopt safer practices and correct hazards.

An important factor in influencing farmers to adopt safer practices is when the people they respect in the community show a positive attitude and a genuine concern for the health and safety of the farm family. People in prominent influential positions may include bankers, chemical dealers, implement dealers, and others in the community who farmers work with closely. (Examples of this type of influence are included later).

The cost of safety equipment is a very important consideration for farmers adopting safety measures. Unlike the industrial setting, farmers are "price-getters" rather than "price-setters". When safety equipment is required in the industrial sector for the protection of workers, that cost is added into the price of the product manufactured and ultimately paid for by the consumer. However, the farmer that installs a ROPS on all his tractors does not receive any more for a bushel of corn than does the farmer without. It is also difficult to justify the cost of safety equipment that does not improve the function or productivity of their equipment. When purchasing safety items, a farmer saves money as a result of something that does NOT happen (e.g., death in a tractor overturn; staying healthy with no life-long respiratory problems; permanent disability from entanglement) and this indeed is a difficult concept to realize and justify.

One examples of assistance with this issue is the ROPS at cost program offered through Deere and Co. There are indications that two other major tractor manufacturers will soon be announcing similar programs. Another example is that of agribusinesses having protective equipment available for clients to purchase. People are more likely to adopt safety practices if they have ready access to the means for change.

The lack of an incentive or reward system for adopting safer practices is also an underlying factor. Industrial settings that offer rewards for days worked without injury etc. have found these types of activities are very effective among employees. Again, the farmer is isolated and independent and the farmer that adopts safer practices does not necessarily receive any recognition for doing so. This is an area that may be a bit more subtle, however, any local incentives that can be developed will prove to be beneficial.

Case Study Examples

In this portion we will discuss examples of specific ways in which ag professionals, as well as farmers, have worked together towards improving the safety and health of Iowa’s farm families.

In a video course on ag safety and health offered through the Iowa State University Off-Campus Programs in Professional Agriculture, students were required to develop safety
In 1993, 42 adult students impacted at least 2000 Iowa farm families. Many projects were designed to be on-going or repeated on an annual basis.

The class project assignment was developed to encourage people to make positive lifestyle changes by gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to promote a behavior change.

Knowledge and awareness are necessary in order for correct and appropriate practices to be developed and implemented. A theme used throughout the course was, put on the ISAFE-T-KAPI for successful farming. In order to Stop Accidents ForEver it must be Through Knowledge, Awareness, and Practice. It was also found that action and involvement led to a further commitment on the part of the participants.

Comparison with projects from the 1990 offering of the course showed a marked increase in projects developed for the community and for others. In 1990 86% of the projects were completed for an individual’s farm or workplace with 6% being developed for community use. In 1993, 65% were developed for use by the community or others. This increase in the proportion of projects developed for community use indicates a strong interest, desire, and willingness by people to become involved with improving the health and wellbeing of Iowa’s farm families.

It should also be pointed out that the relative proportions (by primary occupation) for both offerings of the course were very similar. These proportions were:

- Farming: 45%
- Vo-ag/extension: 19%
- Agribusiness: 19%
- Federal agency: 7%
- Other: 10%

In the 1993 class, several farmers also became involved with developing community-based projects. Several worked with ag professionals in their community towards carrying out these activities.

This community spirit and interest indicates that people are willing and interested in becoming involved in farm safety projects, programs, and issues. People have recognized they can make a difference and have an impact.

This spirit and interest can best be described by reviewing comments and project examples of class participants. These comments and examples are also helpful for developing effective programs in the future.

An agribusiness manager summed up his feelings by stating:

...yes, my philosophy of ag safety has changed from what it was at the beginning of the course. I received personal satisfaction from my class project and I enjoyed putting together the safety equipment that may prevent someone from getting hurt. Before I took the course, I never thought much about safety because I didn’t think there was much I could do about it one way or other. After taking the class I know that I can make a difference.

Farmers commented that it was important to them that the program focused on solutions and a process for correcting hazards and that this approach provided them with the feeling that they could do something towards developing those solutions for themselves and others. Furthermore, they stated that once they had outlined the correction process for their own farm, ...
Examples of specific projects included:

Several farmers replaced or installed SMV emblems on equipment used on public roadways. They also installed extension mirrors on the tractor and lighting packages on grain wagons. An important factor in these items being accomplished was the availability of this accessory equipment locally.

An ag professional developed and presented three programs on chemical safety for clients and for farm wives. He also displayed personal protective equipment (PPE) with descriptions for proper usage. The PPE was displayed on two mannequins — MAMA and PAPA. Mothers Against Machinery Accidents (MAMA) and Protection Against Pesticide Accidents (PAPA). When safety is presented in this manner it does get people's attention as well as being an effective focal point for discussion as to what the safer alternatives and options are. This PPE is available for purchase (again, making corrections available locally).

A hog farmer performed noise level readings of inside the swine confinement building and for machinery that is used on their farm. He found that the noise level produced in the swine facility at feeding time was actually higher than the level produced near a tractor engine. He was able to obtain hearing protection through a local agribusiness and now has that available in a location adjacent to entry into the building.

A farmer worked with a local school and organized a Farm Safety Day for grades K-6 (135 students). Students were bussed to a farm where demonstrations were presented. Topics included tractor overturns, PTO, gravity wagons, first aid, chemical safety, PPE, electrical, animals, and disabilities. This project received support and participation from local agribusinesses and ag professionals as teachers, and suppliers of necessary materials, and equipment.

A paramedic developed a training course for the area EMT's for extrication from agricultural accidents. Again this received sponsorship and endorsement from local agribusinesses.

An example of a farmer helping others was that of one who had had a personal experience with silo gas. He prepared a video in which he identified and explained the hazards associated with silage and silo gas. Later, this information was presented statewide in an excellent farm newspaper article prepared at silo filling time in order to warn others about these hazards.

Several farm safety day camps were developed. These are becoming very popular. During the past few years in Iowa, an estimated 5,000 children and youth have participated in these programs. Agribusinesses have played a major role in the implementation and effectiveness of these day camps. This includes monetary sponsorship and assistance; providing equipment, demonstrations and teachers for presentations; and showing support and endorsement for these programs.

Two brothers worked together on one project. One was a chemical dealer and the other a banker. They prepared and distributed farm safety kits to 250 of their farmer clients. These kits contained gloves, goggles, hearing protection, dust protection, and some safety information. They also included a letter stating that they were concerned with the farmer’s safety and thus they were providing them with this equipment. They noted that many of the recipients made a point to contact them and say a personal thank-you. (This is an example of a project that relates to the previously mentioned issues of peer pressure and incentives. When the banker
personally sends out safety equipment, it is recognized as being 'socially acceptable' to do, as well as it shows the farmer that he is not alone, but that people in the community are concerned for their well-being).

One county extension person worked with agribusinesses in his county to get them to adopt and promote ag safety in one or more ways and that these methods become part of an on-going program effort. For the process of correcting hazards on his personal farm, he developed a prioritization for hazard correction based on risk, practicality, feasibility, resources, and time. Assignments were given to family members for implementing the corrections. A due date was set, along with a REWARD system. As goals were achieved, family members were rewarded. Thus safety became a family activity and not a chore.

One ag professional was able to develop a farm safety unit for use by the 8th grade general science class at the local school. Students had to perform a walk-about on their (or a friend's) farm; they then identified the leading hazards. Based on these results, an individual presentation and demonstration was prepared for each of the three leading hazards. This program was favorably received and the science instructor plans to continue this on a yearly basis.

Two farmers received sponsorship from local agribusinesses to sponsor a farm safety morning at the local coffee shop. Free coffee and doughnuts were provided to attendees who could then view some available videos on farm safety as related to hazards associated with that time of the year.

One farmer worked with ag professionals (education and business) to develop a community ag safety and health committee that develops programs specific to their local area and local needs.

Equipment dealers have been promoting the use of the ROPS. In a University study focusing on ROPS in a NE Iowa county, it has been found that the combination of increasing awareness and providing a means for change at a relatively reduced cost (e.g., $250-$500) are resulting in a marked increase in the installation of ROPS on older tractors.

Agribusinesses have teamed together to provide display booth/tent space at county fairs for promoting farm safety and health through activities, demonstrations, presentations, and distribution of appropriate materials. This sponsorship is valuable for showing farmers that safety is socially acceptable.

A variation of the farm safety day camp is having a farm family safety day (a modified version that is 2 1/2 - 3 hours). Parents bring the children and an over-all general session is presented; children then attend separate presentations and demonstrations while the adults attend a separate adult-oriented presentation. The entire family then gets together to discuss what they can do on their individual farm towards improving safety and health factors.

The adults do attend this and definitely are interested in the information presented -- especially when it includes practical information of what they can do to improve their situation. That these sessions have been attended by the husband and wife together (and not solely by the wife bringing the kids) is an indication of the felt need for this information by farmers.

Conclusion

The above examples indicate that farm families are interested in learning how to make positive changes towards improving their safety and health. These can provide ideas and thoughts for
how you can, in your role as an ag professional, continue to provide programs and support that are effective for Iowa's farm families. YOU ARE making a difference. It used to be the case that farm safety programs were not well attended or well received; however as an ag safety professional working with farm families, I see that trend is changing.

Based on the current trends, as well as the examples shown, it is recognized that the ag professional is a very influential member of the network of people that are working for the improved well-being of Iowa's farm families.

With strong community support and influence, farmers are being encouraged to develop safer farming practices. Farmers' well-being involves participation, encouragement, and active promotion on the part of the entire rural community. Your efforts are making an impact towards improving the safety and health of our farm families.

Agricultural Safety Resources

For assistance with programming ideas or information on contacts in your area, contact the Iowa Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (319-335-4438) or Carol Lehtola, I-CASH Ag Engineering Injury Prev. Specialist (319-335-4065) or Charles Schwab, ISU Extension Safety Specialist (515-294-6360).

Iowa has several clinics that offer health and safety services to farmers. The nurses in these clinics are also actively involved in farm safety and health programming in their area. Contacts for these programs are:

**Iowa Agricultural Health & Safety Services Network**

Cheriee Hogeland, Sartori Memorial Hospital, Cedar Falls 319-266-3584 x.389
Carolyn Sheridan, Spencer Municipal Hospital, Spencer 712-264-6107
Mark Walker, Mercy Health Center, Mason City 515-421-5287
Ag Health & Safety Clinic, Myrtue Mem. Hospital, Harlan 712-755-5161
Lynn Armstrong, Mahaska County Hospital, Oskaloosa 515-673-3431 x. 350
Charlotte Halvorson, Mercy Health Center, Dubuque 319-589-8111
Jane Holley, Van Buren County Hospital, Farmington 319-878-4200

**Occupational Health Nurses in Agricultural Communities**

(each one covers 1/4 of the state; contact the one closest to your area)

Peggy Clarahan, Sigourney 515-622-2680
Mary Kahler, Burt 515-924-3263
Wendy Kuhse, Garnavillo 319-964-2374
Shirley Jones, Atlantic 712-243-5750

The comprehensive ag safety and health course that was described in this workshop will again be held Spring semester (Jan. - May) 1995. This is a cooperative effort between Iowa State University and The University of Iowa as a part of the I-CASH (Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health) program. This course is offered through the Off-Campus Programs in Professional Agriculture at ISU (800-747-4478) and is taught by Dr. Carol Lehtola of the University of Iowa (319-335-4065).