



Working to Protect What Matters

Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health continues to help farmers stay alive and well.

We have a lot to be proud of when it comes to Iowa agriculture. Our rolling pastures and cropland produce enormous amounts of food. We contribute to feeding the world and we also feed our neighbors as a growing number of farmers look to direct markets to diversify their current operations, or start new ones.

But, if we're to lead the world in agriculture, we should also lead the world in safe agriculture. In 1990, Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH) was created by an act of the state legislature. The center is a collaboration between the University of Iowa College of Public Health, Iowa State University, the Iowa Department of Public Health and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. In addition, I-CASH works with other organizations like Farm Safety For Just Kids, AgriWellness, the AgriSafe Clinic Network, and Proteus, among others, to help farmers stay alive and well.

For more than twenty years, I-CASH has provided direct safety consulting to farmers, helped train rural health care professionals, provided safety grants to youth organizations, promoted rural roadway safety, and encouraged manufacturers to enhance safety features on farm equipment. And, things are moving in the right direction. In 1992, there were about 80 farm fatalities. In 2011, there were 28.

In May of this year, I was honored to take on the leadership of I-CASH. As National Farm Safety Week approaches, I can't help but think of the good work we've done and look to the work still ahead of us.

Even though there are fewer deaths on farms than in years past, agriculture still has the highest fatality rate of any industry in Iowa. Many of these deaths happen when a tractor rolls or runs over the operator. ATV and UTV accidents are becoming more common; this year, accidents claimed six children during one week alone. Our bumper grain crops are stored in larger and larger bins, where an engulfment can happen in seconds. Of course, bulls, sows and the rest of the livestock remain as ornery as ever.

Our agricultural workforce looks a little different than it did in years past. As you all know, maybe even from experience, farmers are getting older. Older farmers are at higher risk for slips and falls and may not recover from an injury as well as when they were young. Nearly a quarter of our producers are beginning farmers who are ready to take up the reins as older farmers retire. Some of these producers may not have grown up knowing the day to day dangers of farmwork. We also have growing numbers of migrant and seasonal workers in our state. These folks do some of the hardest work in agriculture, but because of language and cultural barriers, it can be challenging to provide them with the safety

information that they need. I-CASH remains committed to keeping all farmers, farmworkers, and their families safe as they go about the business of producing our food.

Things are changing on the farm and in our rural communities too. Even though commodity crops and livestock remain the bulk of our agricultural products, we're seeing an increase in the number of specialty and direct market crops in Iowa. The grape industry is booming, as is "local food." These crops require more hand labor, causing aching backs and strained muscles. As weeds and pests develop resistance to our chemical controls, we will continue to develop new ones. It's important that pesticide applicators always have the personal protective equipment and information they need to do their work safely. Iowa's cities continue to expand, edging further out into the countryside. And, as agritourism at wineries, orchards and pumpkin patches becomes more popular, we find more urban drivers on rural roads.

This fall, I-CASH is embarking on a new strategic plan. Our statewide network of farmers and institutional partners will spend some time thinking about the greatest safety concerns in agriculture and how we can have a positive effect. Whether you farm five acres of vegetables or 1000 acres of row crops, we want you to have the information and tools you need to get the job done safely. Farming is hard work, but it shouldn't have to be dangerous.

The theme for Farm Safety Week this year is "Safety Counts: Protecting what Matters." If asked, many farmers might first name their families, land and livestock as "what matters." Don't forget to include yourself in that list—you deserve a safe workplace. Farms have become safer over the years, but we have more to do. Agriculture is always changing and bringing new opportunities and challenges. I-CASH is ready for them and we plan to "Protect what Matters" for many years to come.

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