

June 2016 Alive & Well Update: Young Workers on Farms

Farm Activities and Agricultural Injuries in Youth and Young Adult Workers. DeWit, Y; Pickett, W; Lawson, J; Dosman, J. JUL 3 2015. Journal of Agromedicine Special Issue: SI 20(3):318-326.

Youth and young adults who work in the agricultural sector experience high rates of injury. This study aimed to investigate relations between high-risk farm activities and the occurrence of agricultural injuries in these vulnerable groups. A cross-sectional analysis was conducted using written questionnaire data from 1135 youth and young adults from the Saskatchewan Farm Injury Cohort. The prevalence of agricultural injury was estimated at 4.9%/year (95% confidence interval [CI]: 3.7, 6.2). After adjustment for important covariates, duration of farm work was strongly associated with the occurrence of injury (risk ratio [RR] = 8.0 [95% CI: 1.7, 36.7] for 10-34 vs. <10 hours/week; RR = 10.3 [95% CI: 2.2, 47.5] for those working 35+ hours/week). Tractor maintenance, tractor operation, chores with large animals, herd maintenance activities, and veterinary activities were identified as risk factors for agricultural injury. Risks for agricultural injury among youth and young adults on farms relate directly to the amounts and types of farm work exposures that young people engage in.

Farm and rural adolescents' perspective on hearing conservation: Reports from a focus group study. Rosemberg, MAS; McCullagh, MC; Nordstrom, M. MAY-JUN 2015. Noise & Health 17(76):134-140.

This study explored the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of rural and farm adolescents regarding hearing conservation strategies. This qualitative study took place at two high schools in rural Michigan. Twenty-five adolescents living and working on farms or living in rural areas participated in one of two focus groups. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded and analyzed by two researchers and checked by an additional researcher to ensure reliability. Noise exposure was ubiquitous among participants, both in farm-related (e.g., equipment, livestock) and non-farm-related (e.g., music, firearms) activities. Perceived barriers to use of hearing protection devices outweighed perceived benefits, resulting in uncommon use of protection. When hearing protection was used, it was usually earmuffs or earplugs. Participants indicated a lack of training in noise hazards and protective strategies. Despite their acknowledged risk of hearing loss, participants did not associate their use of hearing protection today with their hearing ability later in life. Categories emerging that relate to hearing protector use included: Barriers, benefits, self-efficacy, situational influences, impersonal influences, cues to action, susceptibility, and severity. Farm and rural adolescents are at risk for noise exposure and hearing loss. The findings stress the significance of work environment and adult modeling in facilitating hearing conservation behaviors. As indicated by the youths' recommendations, school-based interventions may be an effective approach to address this health concern. Intervention studies are needed to test various approaches that can effectively promote use of hearing conservation strategies among rural and farm adolescents.

Work Safety Culture of Youth Farmworkers in North Carolina: A Pilot Study. Arcury, TA; Kearney, GD; Rodriguez, G; Arcury, JT; Quandt S. Feb 2015. American Journal of Public Health 105(2):344-50.

Objectives. We analyzed aspects of the behavioral, situational, and psychological elements of work safety culture of hired youth farmworkers in North Carolina.

Methods. Data were from interviewer-administered questionnaires completed with 87 male and female hired farmworkers aged 10 to 17 years in North Carolina in 2013. We computed means, SDs, and Cronbach's alpha values for the perceived work safety climate and safety perception summary scores.

Results. Hired youth farmworkers in North Carolina described a negative work safety culture. Most engaged in unsafe general and unsafe work behaviors, few received training, and many were sexually harassed at work. They had mixed safety attitudes and knew that their employment was precarious. They reported a poor perceived work safety climate characterized by the perception that their supervisors "are only interested in doing the job fast and cheaply." However, we could not detect statistically significant associations between work safety culture and injuries among these farmworkers.

Conclusions. Increased scrutiny of agriculture as a suitable industry for workers as young as 10 years and additional regulations to protect hired youth farmworkers, if not to remove them from this environment, are warranted. Additional research is needed.