College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences
Ohio State University Extension
Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center

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New Center to Promote Agricultural Safety and Health

By Candace Pollock
(614) 292-3799
pollock.58@osu.edu
Source: Tom Bean
(614) 292-9455
bean.3@osu.edu

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Agriculture is one of the most important United States industries, representing 13 percent of the nation’s economy, but it is also one of the most dangerous. According to the National Safety Council, over 700 farmers and ranchers die in agriculture-related accidents each year and agriculture is consistently ranked among the top three most dangerous industries, alongside mining/quarrying and construction.

Ohio State University researchers, seeking to keep the industry prosperous while maintaining a safe environment for its workforce, plan to promote agricultural safety and health through the development of a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) center. The main focus of the center is to conduct research and promote comprehensive educational and research-based outreach programs.

NIOSH is a federal agency that promotes research and makes recommendations regarding the prevention of work-related diseases and injuries. The institute is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Ohio State was one of 10 entities chosen by NIOSH to house an agricultural safety and health center, known as the Great Lakes Center for Agricultural Safety and Health. It is designed to serve agricultural employers, employees and their families throughout Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and West Virginia.

“The purpose of the center and its activities is to encourage agricultural safety and health practices in farming, forestry, fishing – any agricultural-related industry,” said Tom Bean, Ohio State Extension safety leader and the center’s director. “We are very excited to have been chosen as one of the sites for such a center.”

The center’s development is a collaborative effort between individuals from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and the College of Medicine, School of Public Health. The main office will be housed in the Department of Food, Agricultural, and Biological Engineering. Jay Wilkins, of the School of Public Health, will serve as the center’s deputy director.

The center, which was approved for development last fall, is comprised of three core areas: a research core that facilitates/promotes collaboration among researchers affiliated with the center; a prevention/education core that facilitates the development and implementation of evaluation projects; and an education/outreach core that facilitates the transition of research results into educational programs.

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“We are in the early stages right now and just trying to build its internal structure,” said Bean. “We have plans to develop a website and a newsletter and establish a pilot grants program to encourage future research, and education and outreach programs to be developed by other potential principal investigators.”

University representatives have been awarded $350,000 for the center’s first two years to support such programs as farm-related asthma, sun safety and the pilot grants program. Other affiliated programs of the center include an Ohio Amish project, a national safe tractor and machinery operation certification research program, and farm safety programs for youth.

Other focus areas highlighted through the center include ergonomics, pesticide exposure, unintentional injuries, and educational and outreach programs.

“We want the center to be a place where people can come for information through the different types of educational programs and activities that will be offered,” said Bean. “The center also helps us to serve a multi-state area and be a place where we can grow and acquire new partners in the effort to help make agriculture a safe industry to work in.”

Other areas across the country where NIOSH centers are housed include: Colorado State University; University of Washington; University of Texas; Marshfield Medical Research and Education Foundation, Marshfield, Wis.; East Carolina University; Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital, Cooperstown, N.Y.; University of Iowa; University of Kentucky; and University of California, Davis.