

IOWA

College of Public Health

Business Leadership Network

MAKING FARMING SAFER:

Resources for Improving Ag Workers' Health and Wellness

Community Forum Summary

March 3, 2022

SPENCER



BUSINESS LEADERSHIP NETWORK

The Business Leadership Network comprises Iowans who are leaders in business, educators, public health professionals, health care professionals, and community leaders who are interested in improving the health and well-being of their community through a mutually beneficial relationship with the University of Iowa College of Public Health. The Network is guided by a Business Leadership Network Steering Committee which serves in a primary advisory role.

One way the UI College of Public Health collaborates with Iowa communities is through the Business Leadership Network Community Grant Project. Grants are awarded annually on a competitive basis to community nonprofit organizations or local government agencies to foster collaboration to begin or strengthen partnerships among businesses and industry to address an identified public health issue and link with the UI College of Public Health. Four grants have been awarded for 2022 with projects in Albia, Cedar Falls, DeWitt, and Dubuque. More info at: www.public-health.uiowa.edu/bln-community-grant-program.

In Spring 2022, the college through its Business Leadership Network, continued to reach out to communities regarding local business and community public health issues. The Spencer community forum provided opportunities for area business, community, and public health leaders to discuss the physical and mental health impact on farmers, resources for small businesses and healthcare providers to support farmers, integrating public health into agricultural business models, and determine potential areas to collaborate with the UI College of Public Health. This summary provides a glimpse into the day's discussions.



WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

Public Health is the science and art of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and research for disease and injury prevention. Public health helps improve the health and wellbeing of people in local communities and often, while operating in the background, helps meet the public expectation for ensuring a quality of life – safe water, clean air, and protection from injury. The dramatic achievements of public health in the 20th and 21st centuries have improved our quality of life: an increase in life expectancy, safer workplaces, worldwide reduction in infant and child mortality, and the elimination or reduction of many communicable diseases.

WWW.PUBLIC-HEALTH.UIOWA.EDU/BLN

The Mission of the UI College of Public Health is to promote health and prevent injury and illness through commitment to education and training, excellence in research, innovation in policy development, and devotion to public health practice.

MAKING FARMING SAFER

The purpose of the community forum was to bring together public health, local businesses, and community organizations to discuss how to improve agricultural workers' health and wellness. The forum was jointly sponsored by the UI College of Public Health's Business Leadership Network, Ag Health and Safety Alliance, Crown Clinics, Spencer Chamber of Commerce, Clay County Public Health, and Spencer Hospital.

Panel on Improving Ag Worker's Health and Wellness

Diane Rohlman is Associate Dean for Research and Professor of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health.

The University of Iowa is focused on teaching, research, and service. Some of our research has focused on whole body vibrations, how that is harming people sitting in tractors/combines for long periods, hearing protection, lung protection, and helping young workers adopt safe practices. Our research centers allow us to get this research out into the communities, and we can develop materials to be used in the workplace. We have a graduate training program in ag safety and health. We partner with ISU who teaches you how to farm, and the UI teaches how to be safe on the farm.

Rohlman is also the Director of the Healthier Workforce Center of the Midwest which is a federally funded center that focuses on traditional workplace hazards and how work impacts health and wellbeing. Mental health is a huge issue that has been made worse by the pandemic, and suicide rates are highest in the Midwest. The center offers free online resources to help employers improve health, safety, and well-being in the workplace:

www.HealthierWorkforceCenter.org.

- Training and resources for supervisors of young agricultural workers, who get injured at much higher rates than older workers. The free online training will help supervisors (employers, parents, or teachers) build some skills and model safe behaviors – also available in Spanish:
hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/protecting-young-ag-workers.
- Suicide prevention campaign for the workplace: hwc.public-health.uiowa.edu/you-ok-campaign
 - *Toolbox talks* – 5 short one-page documents that take about 10 min to cover. Could be used during a safety meeting, or a lunch and learn – there is also a facilitator guide to help the person leading the conversation.
 - “You OK?”
 - Stickers that you could put on name badges, hard hat, water bottles, etc.
 - Small medallions that have the suicide prevention hotline phone number and the message “You OK?” If someone is in distress or you are worried about someone, you can hand them one of the medallions and they’ll know someone cares. May is mental health month – if you want to implement this in your workplace.



Funding available:

- Business Leadership Network Community Grant Program – supports community public health-related projects and provides up to \$3,000 for a 9-month project. Next funding round is expected to open in November 2022: www.public-health.uiowa.edu/bln-community-grant-program.

Marsha Cheyney is the Evaluation and Outreach Coordinator at Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. The center is federally funded and provides occupational health and safety research and outreach for farmers, their families, and communities. The center has a lot of free resources promoting agricultural safety and health: gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/for-farmers-2.

Outreach:

- Have materials that can help healthcare providers start conversations with their patients about types of risks and exposures on the farm and how to prevent injury and illness.
- Work with ag businesses and do trainings. Example: A farm in eastern Iowa was agitating a manure pit and had cows starting to fall over. The Great Plains Center investigated, found the problem, and then participated in a community forum on the issue and held a training on how to prevent injuries with gas monitors. That led to the local co-op handing out gas monitors to help protect workers.

Education:

- Agricultural Safety and Health Core Course is a one-week program offered every summer. The next course will be held virtually June 13-17, 2022: gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/education/agricultural-safety-and-health-the-core-course.
- Have variety of outreach kits to train people on topics like manure gas safety and hearing protection.
- Online free modules for asynchronous training.
- New podcast called [FarmSafe](#) – 15 minute episodes tell story of an incident that happened and how to prevent.
- Have a monthly column in *Iowa Farmer Today* called Safety Watch.

Research:

- Designed ventilations systems for livestock production buildings, developed app to identify safety hazards on the farm which gives immediate feedback for easy safety fixes.
- Working on developing safety program on the farm for people living with dementia.
- Working with ISU Extension to implement community driving campaigns – on sharing the road with farm equipment especially during planting and harvest seasons.

Funding available:

- Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health Community Pilot Grant – supports projects that address hazards relevant to farmers and farm workers and provides up to \$30,000 for a 12-18 month project. Currently accepting proposals: gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/community-grants.

Carolyn Sheridan is the Executive Director and Founder of the Ag Health & Safety Alliance, an international nonprofit organization that focuses on health and safety for the next generation of agriculture: aghealthandsafety.com.

They have a program that teaches college and high school ag students' topics such as whole-body vibration from farm equipment, hearing, and lung protection. They take the research and resources from the University of Iowa and other collaborators and present it in a way that is entertaining to the students. Participants in the courses receive a "gear for ag bag" – a place to put their personal protective safety equipment to keep in the car or combine.

Sheridan is a registered nurse and took the UI course in Ag Health and Safety and brought that knowledge back to Spencer Hospital. She shared that just because you are a nurse and grow up on a farm, doesn't mean you automatically know about ag health and safety.

Sue Brugman is a nurse practitioner and owns and operates Crown Clinics, a family practice clinic in Spencer: www.crownclinicsmobile.com. The clinic focuses on prevention services and making them more affordable and available to people.

Most workers in the Spencer area are ag workers or cater to ag workers like bank lenders. To accommodate farming patients and their families, the clinic is open 7 days a week until 7pm most nights. When a farmer patient comes into the clinic, staff discuss protective equipment to keep them healthy. The clinic often takes services like flu vaccines to workplaces since many workers cannot take the time off.

After attending the Ag Outlook conference (agoutlook.com) regularly and seeing elderly farmers with health issues like hearing loss, Brugman saw a need to bring safety awareness to the soon to be younger farmers and the FFA students. She surveyed the students on safety practices on the farm and realized they are learning from their parents and so there is a need to educate both students and their parents.

Brugman also took the University of Iowa course in Ag Health and Safety and sees her role as liaison between research and education and caring for rural populations.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants divided into groups to further discuss supporting farmers' physical and mental health and how businesses can adapt to better serve farmers. Most everyone during the discussions mentioned they had a farm connection – whether they grew up on a farm, currently farm, or have family or friends farming.

Care Connections of Northern Iowa shared some of their services. They are a mental health region and have 14 regions across the state that help provide access to mental health and disability services: ccnia.org.

- Trying to change the terminology and get the public to think of it as brain health instead of mental health.
- Mobile Crisis services – they partner with Seasons Center in Spencer that has a crisis line available 24 hours/day.
- They recently launched a community-based crisis stabilization which can be geared toward ag providers. When someone has a brain health crisis instead of going to the ER, you can call the mobile crisis that will meet you at your home and determine the care you may need.



Iowa State University Extension discussed their Farm and Ranch Wellness project that is in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. They have resources for producers and ranchers and for those who work with them.

- Midwest Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center: farmstress.org
- Farm Stress and Mental Health (link to pdf file): store.extension.iastate.edu/product/16350-pdf
- Stress on the Farm (link to pdf file): store.extension.iastate.edu/product/16351-pdf

March and April are a difficult time of year for farmers, and when a lot of suicides occur. Work in the spring is very solitary, and there is uncertainty on when planting can begin. Some ideas to implement during this time:

- Radio station PSAs or Facebook blasts – should do safety messages and suicide prevention messages more in March and April.
- Materials on suicide prevention – distribute to local health facilities and co-ops, bank with loan officers to share.
- When talking to a farming client and asking how they are doing the usual response is “good.” You need to ask a few times to get a better understanding of their real feelings.
- Need to publicize mental health hotlines more. Distribute the “You OK” stickers for use on water bottles.

- The chamber and community organizations could consider proving a hot lunch to farmers in the spring. Could have delivery or pickup points at different spots around town. In the fall, these groups provide treat bags for farmers and deliver when they are in the fields. Gives farmers a break and a social interaction.
- In Washington County they do a blessing of the tractors before the beginning of the season. They provide safety talks and discuss risk factors for accidents with equipment.
- You OK campaign – would be good to place on the electronic billboard in town. Have the You OK medallions available all-around town in various businesses.
- Make availability of services convenient to farmers – have additional hours to accommodate.
- Chamber weekly email newsletter – could add something on ag safety or general health and wellness.
- The Great Plains Center has provided safety give-a-ways as part of outreach activities like slow moving vehicle signs and stickers to put on vehicles. Could be available at businesses and co-ops.
- Next Ag Outlook conference (Feb, 21, 2023) would be a good place to have University of Iowa with a vendor booth on safety materials.

Law enforcement is typically the first responder and referral for a crisis. There is an upcoming crisis intervention training for law enforcement officers in Clay County – hope to provide monthly.

Care Connections used recent COVID-19 funds to do some rebranding and target marketing to ag partners. One aim is to reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues in rural areas. People who have been touched by the issues recognize the importance, though still struggle with stigma, and find talking about issues to be difficult. Need to provide concrete examples of people they know who have dealt with issues as seeing peers having those conversations lessens the stigma and reluctance.



Health insurance is very expensive, and farmers often choose high deductible plans which means they don't tend to seek preventative health care.

- There are programs that help people find health insurance – need to publicize.
- People without insurance can go to the Grand Avenue Free Medical Clinic. It offers basic health care and free medications.
- Having insurance that covers mental health is key, as is knowing whether it is covered.
- Telehealth can be very beneficial to accessibility among rural populations.

Unemployment and workforce development are issues in rural communities. After COVID, workplaces are being more creative in who they hire and are not having as much difficulty in finding workers as they did pre-pandemic.

Need to consider the needs of migrant/seasonal workers such as good housing, weather appropriate (warm) clothing, food, safe working conditions, etc. Supplying basic needs improves mental health and lowers stress and encourages workers to return year after year.

Questions? Contact: Tara McKee tara-mckee@uiowa.edu.

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