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Comments

I appreciate the efforts that have gone into producing such a comprehensive report on the state of child focused agricultural research.

The report makes a nice case for the progression of the Childhood Ag Initiative. Despite the declining numbers of deaths to children engaged in agriculture there is an actual increase in nonfatal injuries, most of which is not captured in the NIOSH report; thus we have not made as much progress as first appears. The "simple" solution of getting children off the farm during work or providing child care is not realistic. Farmwork is not done in an 8-5 shift; it occurs when it needs to occur. Although children are employed as farm workers, the majority of children are members of farm families and will always be present in the work place: it is their home. The tremendous efforts that have been expended to provide the NAGCAT guidelines have met with continued resistance by farm families.

Very little funding has been earmarked for providing safe play areas or for community based research that may lead to new innovative solutions provided by farm families themselves. There has been no research funded on the social and economic consequences of farm work performed by children. Although the focus of NIOSH is occupational injury most injuries to younger children on farms are not consequences of work performed by the children but by their presence on the farm and using the farmstead, machinery, and animals for recreation. It is impossible to always ferret out the work versus play areas. Instead the emphasis must be on equipping the farm family to recognize and minimize hazards and on the children to understand to the best of their ability how to protect themselves by taking appropriate actions. Behavior changes such as these are accomplished very slowly and tracking those changes cannot be done in a three year grant. Funding follow up surveillance of behavior change should be a priority.

A growing number of farms are not large commercial operations but are small "hobby" farms. Many of these small acreages will have the same (although smaller versions) of machinery and equipment as larger farms.

Emphasis should be placed on the safety of children on these establishments.

While MSDs are being addressed I see no reports on hearing conservation among farm youth performing farm work. There is support that hearing loss occurs at accelerated rates among farm youth; this should be an area of focus in the future.

Tractor related fatalities continue to lead the list, this despite a growing increase in mandatory education in tractor operation and massive amounts of Federal dollars in the tractor safety initiative. If there is one area where policy and enforcement is needed, it is tractor operation by youth.

The document states that a focus area is on model programs for training farm children to do farm work. I contend that there has been a model program for decades in the public school system. Agricultural classes abound for youth in rural areas. These technical classes prepare the next generation of farmers

and ranchers. As a recipient of an extramural R01 funded through this initiative I have witnessed ag classes where safety is emphasized and others where safety is scoffed. Intervention research working directly in tandem with the National Agriculture Educators could be a boon to promoting curricula that emphasizes the positive outcomes of safe work behavior. Youth learn most through role modeling. Ag teachers provide that model and have a tremendous influence on the children under their watch.

I fully support the efforts and funding that have made up this emphasis area. The people I have worked with are passionate in their efforts to safeguard children. In my work with local communities and volunteer organizations it takes only a second to realize that families and communities also will not tolerate injuries to children on farms. While regulation and policy are always touted as the sure cure, we in the fields know that it is not. We must continue to work alongside the local communities to discover what works. Unfortunately, by the time we get a program up and running the time and money runs out. The research should be funded for an extended amount of time or an intermittent return time, in order to evaluate what we have done. Dr. Marlenga's recently funded grant to follow up on the children enrolled several years ago in a hearing conservation project is an excellent example of how this can be accomplished. The joint project of the University of Alabama and the University of KY in refining and testing new methods and curricula for Safety Days, based on their previously funded evaluation of those educational offerings, is another example of how longitudinal research can be done.