Certified Safe Farm Kicks Off Expanded Program

Recruitment has begun for an expanded research program entitled “Certified Safe Farm (CSF): Evaluating Health Insurance Claims.” Farmers are being recruited initially around Spencer, Iowa, and then in the areas of Dubuque, Ida Grove, Keosauqua, and Oskaloosa.

The program's goal is to reduce illnesses and injuries in farmers who volunteer to participate. A previous 5-year CSF study, conducted in Northwest Iowa, tracked illness and injury rates, behavioral health changes, and farm safety improvements. Data collection tools included occupational health history questionnaires, an on-farm safety review scoresheet, and quarterly phone calls. In the new program, information will again be gathered through self-reported questionnaires, but health insurance claims data will also be obtained from farmers insured by Wellmark Inc. These data will allow comparisons of the costs and rates of illness and injury between CSF and non-CSF groups of farmers. The CSF groups will receive the three primary CSF services—occupational health screening, individualized and group education, and an on-farm safety review—every other year at no cost. The study will continue through 2007.

CSF is a collaboration of several organizations, including Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the AgriSafe Network, and Wellmark Inc. Industry support also comes from Monsanto and Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc.

“This is a significant step in the CSF program,” said Kelley J. Donham, director of I-CASH. “It brings us closer to our vision of an incentive-based agricultural safety and health program sustained by agribusinesses and insurers.”

To learn more about the expanded CSF program, contact Sara Schneiders at 319/335-4065 or sara-schneiders@uiowa.edu.

Let’s have a dialogue on “megatrends” in agriculture. Each year I present the “State of I-CASH” at the I-CASH Spring Meeting, and this year I reviewed for the meeting participants the “Megatrends in Agriculture” identified by “Doane’s Agricultural Report” (January 30, 2004).

Briefly, those trends are 1) the continued consolidation of agriculture--new global markets and technological developments; 2) the development of niche markets (e.g., organic or exotic crops); 3) the power of the consumer (as in the low-carb diet trend); 4) jobs development in rural areas; 5) capital/financial pressures; 6) emerging diseases such as mad cow; and finally, 7) much more public scrutiny of ag policy. We can expect debates over increasing governmental regulation, animal welfare and food safety; environmental stewardship, antibiotic resistance, and child and worker safety.

How do these trends positively or negatively affect people in agricultural communities? What can I-CASH do to help control the negative effects? Please send us your thoughts and ideas (email meggan-harrington@uiowa.edu). That will give us input for future newsletters and e-bulletins.
Agricultural workers are routinely exposed to organic dusts containing high concentrations of endotoxin. Invasive procedures such as nasal or bronchial lavage or induced sputum are often used to study inflammation resulting from such exposures. The whole blood assay (WBA) is a less invasive approach that may serve as a biomarker for assessing susceptibility and responsiveness to inhaled inflammatory agents in organic dust. This laboratory blood test measures cytokine production of circulating leukocytes after stimulation of whole blood with endotoxin.

We have previously validated the WBA in mice. In the current study, livestock farmers, concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO) workers, grain workers, and previously unexposed adults are exposed to a nebulized solution of purified endotoxin at the University of Iowa Clinical Exposure Facility. We are using pulmonary function testing (PFT), symptom questionnaires and a WBA to evaluate differences in pre- and post-exposure responses. We hypothesize that exposure to endotoxin will amplify the WBA response. Furthermore, we hope to determine differences in WBA cytokine concentrations between workers and previously unexposed adults. It is possible that workers, tolerized to endotoxin through their work exposures, will have a diminished response in the WBA compared to control subjects.

Of the intended 30 subjects (15 workers and 15 controls), 18 have so far completed the study (3 workers and 15 controls). Intensive efforts are underway to recruit more livestock/farmers/animal facility workers.

For more information, please contact Linda Mueller-Anneling at (319) 335-4223 or linda-anneling@uiowa.edu
Nominations are being accepted for the 2004 Agricultural Safety and Health Hall of Fame Award, which recognizes individuals and/or organizations in Iowa who have made substantial contributions to the health and safety of Iowa's agricultural community. Nominees should have played a leadership role in agricultural safety and health prevention activities for 5+ years. The recipient will receive a $100 cash award at a ceremony during National Farm Safety & Health Week. Nomination forms are available from Eileen Fisher, eileen-fisher@uiowa.edu (319/335-4224) or www.public-health.uiowa.edu/ICASH/HallofFameAward.html
Mark Your Calendars
Midwest Rural Agricultural Safety and Health Forum
November 18-19, 2004

I-CASH is partnering with the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health and other safety and health specialists from Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin to organize a fall conference focused on “Creating Partnerships for Agricultural Health and Safety Policy.” Presenters will be asked to describe the policy implication of their research, education, and outreach. Participants will hear examples of policy change and receive training in advocacy for agricultural safety and health. Mark your calendars for November 18-19, 2004. Check the I-CASH web site at www.public-health.uiowa.edu/icash for details on registration and the Call for Abstracts.