

Penn State Research Projects To Track Farm Injury Impacts

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Researchers in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences and the Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health in the College of Health and Human Development are conducting two separate but related studies tracking the social and economic impacts of farm-related injuries on farm families and their communities.

"How do you find out what the loss of a farmer meant to the organizations he once belonged to, how that loss affects the farmer's community, or what financial pressures a severe injury meant to a farm operation?" said Dennis Murphy, professor of agricultural engineering. "Individuals are not the only ones experiencing financial losses. The community and the state also see financial impacts. It's crucial for

farmers to participate in this study so that we can gain a clearer picture of how injuries can affect an entire community."

"Farming communities rely on individuals to be involved in a number of local activities," said Lisa Davis, director of the Office of Rural Health. "The loss of key community leaders can be devastating."

The research team will interview farmers, their families and community members. Murphy and Davis believe that the combined experiences gleaned from these interviews will allow a picture to emerge that provides a larger view of farmers as contributing members of their communities. Documenting the impacts on a community provides a tool to promote changes that will help reduce farm injuries and fatalities.

Murphy said one set of mailings is going out to farm families who have been affected by farm injuries or death. The mailing list comes from Penn State's Farm Injury Statistics database, which is compiled from newspaper accounts and death certificates. The letter asks farmers who have suffered injuries that caused some level of disability, or relatives of farmers who have died in farm-related accidents, to participate in the project. If they agree, members of the research team will interview them about their life as a farmer and the ways in which they participate in the community.

"After the initial interview with a family member, we will speak with key colleagues of the farmer in the community," said Sally Maud Robertson, research assistant in agricultural engi-

neering.

The second project centers on tracking the economic impacts of farm injuries on families and their communities, as well as the cumulative financial impact on Pennsylvania's economy. In cooperation with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, the researchers will mail out a letter every four months through the fall of 2001. If any of the farm operations receiving the letters had a farm injury, they are asked to participate in a detailed interview focusing on the financial costs of a farm worker injury.

"The letter basically asks farmers if they would mind being interviewed about a farm injury," Robertson explains. "They return the mailer with their name, phone number and recommendations as to the best time to call."

Robertson said all interviews remain confidential.

"Penn State collates many farm-related safety statistics, but these studies really can help us understand how a farm injury affects people and organizations beyond the victim of the injury," Murphy said. "We hope that farm operators will work with us to help understand this issue."

The Pennsylvania Office of Rural Health is a joint effort of the College of Health and Human Development and Penn State Cooperative Extension. Its mission is to improve the health of rural communities and their residents throughout the commonwealth. The office compiles, analyzes, and disseminates information to policy makers, health providers, health educators, and health administrators. It also strengthens the existing network of rural providers, planners, and advocates by encouraging partnerships and identifying opportunities for collaboration

and cooperation.

The office's mission also includes increasing interest in rural health needs, opportunities, and policy issues, and acting as a liaison between academia, state government, professional associations, and the general public.

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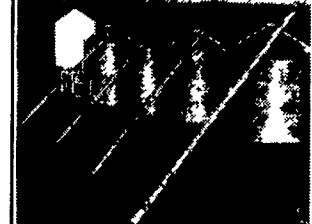
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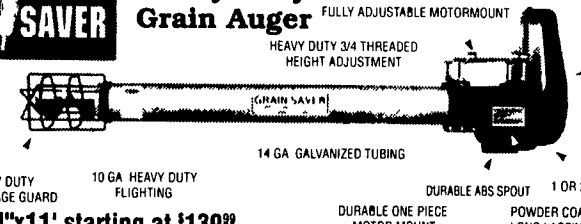
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