NFMC helps shape national action plan for ag safety, health

True to its name, the National Farm Medicine Center has positioned itself as a leader in establishing a national action plan for systematic reduction of disease and injury among workers in agriculture.

The Farm Center enhanced a working relationship with others who will shape federal programs and industry initiatives when it hosted a meeting of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)-National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) Sector Council on Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing on Aug. 1-2 at Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation.

“This 30-member council represents diverse interests,” said Barbara Lee, Ph.D., co-chair of the sector council. “These people have considerable influence on proposing and implementing strategic goals at a national level, including funding from sources both public and private.”

Participants at the meeting, including Ralph Bredl, a Stratford, Wisconsin, dairy producer, represented agricultural business, producers, migrant workers, safety professionals and NIOSH scientists. They drafted strategic goals, which included priorities such as surveillance to enumerate workers' adverse exposures, with special attention to the “vulnerable” because of age, language, migration, culture or disability, said Dr. Lee.

Other goals are to reduce farm machinery deaths, musculoskeletal disorders related to repetitive job movements and emerging issues including infectious diseases.

Barbara Lee, Ph.D., and George Conway, M.D., M.P.H., co-chairs of the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) Sector Council on Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing. Dr. Conway is director of the NIOSH agriculture program.

Tractor safety: The National Agricultural Tractor Safety Initiative met in Marshfield July 30-31 to discuss key findings and next steps in its campaign to reduce tractor-related deaths and injuries, most of which are attributable to overturns. NFMC Research Engineer Mark Purschwitz, Ph.D., coordinated the meeting, held at Clearwaters Hotel and Convention Center, Marshfield, Wisconsin.

Dr. Purschwitz has been heavily involved since the tractor initiative’s inception in 2003. He is researching ways to reduce barriers to the retrofitting of rollover protective structures (ROPS) on farm tractors. “Because tractor-related fatalities represent a major proportion of farm deaths in the U.S., the planning we did at this meeting to help prevent those deaths should pay dividends for years to come,” Dr. Purschwitz said.
The NFMC produced an up-to-date reference that reviews acute and chronic health effects of pesticide exposure on the major body organ systems. This special issue of the NFMC’s Journal of Agromedicine is based on work originally presented at the groundbreaking 2002 conference in Washington, D.C. Authors revised, updated, and expanded their presentations. “This is an essential resource for health care and public health practitioners, occupational health professionals and governmental employees dealing with the environment,” said Steve Kirkhorn, M.D., M.P.H., editor of the Journal of Agromedicine and medical director of the NFMC. In other Journal of Agromedicine news, Joseph J. Mazza, M.D., MACP, has been named Senior Associate Editor. Dr. Mazza is an Emeritus Research Scientist at Marshfield Clinic, and Associate Editor of Wisconsin Medical Journal.

Stueland Scholar

James Dosman, M.D., a Canadian physician, teacher and researcher known as an international leader in agricultural medicine, was named the 2007 Stueland Scholar. Dr. Dosman received the award on Oct. 31 at Froehlke Auditorium on the campus of Marshfield Clinic-Marshfield Center. Dr. Dosman, who has treated and studied respiratory disease for four decades, will spearhead his sixth international symposium, Oct. 19-23, 2008, on public health and the agricultural rural ecosystem. Dr. Dosman’s Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan, will host the symposium.

Environmental Microbiology

Steve Foley, Ph.D., helped organize the 67th annual meeting of the North Central Branch of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) on Oct. 5-6, 2007 at Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation. More than 100 microbiologists attended. Dr. Foley presented a talk titled, “Avian Colibacillosis: Importance and the Development of Control Measures,” which focused on work being carried out in his laboratory related to development of non-antimicrobial means to control pathogens. Three members of Dr. Foley’s lab presented posters: Lindsay Dorsey (summer student); Donna David; and Pravin Kaldhone. “The meeting provided us a forum to showcase our research and to interact with other scientists in the region in an effort to form collaborations and move our sciences forward more rapidly,” Dr. Foley said. “There were a number of posters/talks that related to agriculture and the potential impact on human health.”

Roberto Marrero-Ortiz, Ph.D., postdoctoral research fellow, joined Dr. Borchardt’s laboratory in October. Dr. Marrero-Ortiz was formerly a science teacher in Puerto Rico. Recently, he completed his Ph.D. at the University of Arizona, where he evaluated the chemical, physical and microbial water quality of homeowner wells and public drinking groundwater systems in the state of Arizona. Dr. Marrero is working on the survival, transport and die-off of pathogenic viruses, bacteria and protozoa in agricultural settings. This project is a partnership between Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation and the USDA Agricultural Research Service.