

In the 2012 Presidential budget, the administration has proposed to terminate all funding for *the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing Program (AFF)* within the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). However, agricultural safety and health has been an important focus of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) for more than 20 years. Moved by evidence that agricultural workers were suffering higher rates of work-related injury and illness than other U.S. workers, even those in other extractive industries, in 1990 Congress designated NIOSH to lead a comprehensive national effort to prevent occupational injuries and disease in this large, high risk sector. An innovative feature of the enabling legislation (P.L. 101-517) was the call to establish extramural centers. The legislation specifically charged NIOSH with responsibility to select and fund agricultural occupational safety and health centers at select universities (NAS, 2008).

Today NIOSH funds 7 regional Centers for Agricultural Disease and Injury Research, Education, and Prevention, as well as the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. If funding to the AFF program were eliminated, more than 5.5 million full- and part-time and contract and seasonal workers as well as farm family members would face increased work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths. Agriculture, due to its decentralized nature and diverse structure, lags other industries in reducing the toll on its workers. Its fatality rate is 8 times that of the all-industry average. In a typical year, 551 workers die while doing farm work. In 2008, the AFF sector saw a work-related fatality rate of 24.8 deaths per 100,000 workers. More than 1 in 10 AFF workers experience nonfatal injuries resulting in lost work days each year, and this reported figure does not even include men, women, and youths on farms with fewer than 11 full-time employees. Such injuries and deaths reflect real harm to working men and women and their families. They also reflect serious economic losses to individual farming operations and sector productivity. In the past, these losses have been estimated to exceed \$4 billion in direct and indirect costs (range \$4.5 to \$13.9 billion). Most establishments in agriculture, forestry, and fishing (nearly 78 percent) employ fewer than 10 full-time workers (DOL 2011) and are therefore exempt from most worker protection statutes. Many operations rely on immigrant, part-time, and seasonal/contract laborers and few sector workers are represented by unions. The average age of the American farmer is 55 years old. More than 1 million youth lived on farms in 2009 and more than half of them performed farm work or chores. Thus, the NIOSH AFF program aims to protect these vulnerable workers in addition to providing leadership in applied research, disease and injury surveillance, education, and prevention.

Examples of NIOSH Agricultural Centers Accomplishments:

Preventing the # 1 cause of traumatic injury deaths on U.S. farms: NIOSH AFF Center research has shown that the use of rollover protective structures (ROPS or rollbars) and seatbelts on tractors can prevent 98 percent of overturn related deaths. A New York program has increased the installation of ROPS by 10-fold and has documented 63 close calls with no injuries among farmers who had installed ROPS.

Protecting children: More than 1 million youths under age 20 live on farms, and more than half perform farm work or chores. Center-developed guidelines for parents to match chores with a child's developmental and physical capabilities have helped to reduce injuries and deaths among children who live, visit and work on farms: Between 1998 and 2009, the rate of non-fatal agricultural injuries among children per 1,000 farms dropped by 59 percent.

Reducing Pesticide Exposures: Working in partnership with producers and farm owners, the NIOSH AFF Centers have developed evidence-based solutions for reducing exposure to pesticides

and other farm chemicals. This work has been important for the protection of farmers, workers and their children. Since the Centers' inception, there have been major advances in pesticide science, with Center researchers duly recognized as experts in their field and often called upon to provide objective, reliable data and serve on regional and national advisory committees.

Commercial Fishing had a reported annual fatality rate 28 times higher than the rate for all U.S. workers in 2007. Research has shown that knowledge of maritime navigation rules and emergency preparedness means survival. An interactive navigation training CD has been produced in three languages, effectiveness of refresher survival drill instruction has been demonstrated, and US Coast Guard regulations have been changed to require commercial fishing vessel captains to complete navigation training. This work has been accomplished efficiently and in collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security through the US Coast Guard.

Partnering with Stakeholders: The Centers leverage \$2 million per year in external support and in-kind contributions from private sector partners who recognize that preventing occupational injuries is cost-effective and protects not only workers but also the financial bottom line.

Collaborative, on farm efforts: Centers have worked with dairy producers and industry associations throughout the Great Plains, Southwest and Western U.S. to develop bilingual safety training tools and safety management manuals; have provided workshops on safety as sound business practice, and led safety audits to help producers incorporate safety and health protocols into daily practice to protect workers and ensure industry productivity and growth. California researchers used on-farm testing to demonstrate that 5-minute rest breaks every hour reduce musculoskeletal symptoms among migrant farm workers. In Washington State, investigators have partnered with the WA Tree Fruit Research commission and manufacturers to design safety into new technologies to increase productivity and maintain a healthy workforce. In Maine, on-farm research led to improved design of a blueberry rake that increased productivity while reducing musculoskeletal problems. The rake has been adopted by 73% of workers.

Safety for Forest Workers: In 2008, the logging industry had a reported fatality rate of 108.1 deaths per 100,000 workers – a rate more than 30 times higher than the fatality rate for all US workers. NIOSH AFF Centers including the Southeast and the Northwest are uniquely positioned to ensure the safety of our nation's 86,000 workers in forestry & logging. Loss of funding would leave these at-risk workers without the Centers' support.

Agromedicine: Center researchers have partnered with producers and employers, the federal migrant health program, physicians, occupational health nurses, and internet technology specialists to bring 21st Century teaching and tools to rural health care. If program funding is eliminated, continued progress will be lost.

In summary, production agriculture, forestry and commercial fishing include the most deadly occupations in U.S. commerce. The AFF Program is the only substantive federal effort to meet the national obligation to ensure safe and healthful working conditions in these vital industries.

Continued funding of the AFF Program is vital to the men, women, and younger workers who provide food and fiber for our entire nation.

To find out more about what you can do to help prevent the termination of the NIOSH AFF program contact the Northeast Center for Agricultural and Occupational Health at jsorensen@nycamh.com.