

## NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL RESEARCH AGENDA

The National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) is a working document that may not receive a lot of press coverage but that, nonetheless, drives the direction of research and practice in occupational safety and health in the United States. NORA is the strategic plan for the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

### Background

"The National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) is a partnership program to stimulate innovative research and improved workplace practices. Unveiled in 1996, NORA has become a research framework for NIOSH and the nation. Diverse parties collaborate to identify the most critical issues in workplace safety and health. Partners then work together to develop goals and objectives for addressing these needs." (NORA Website).

*"This is the first time that the strategic plan for NIOSH includes protection of the psychological well-being of people involved in agriculture. We have the task of addressing the most neglected area of agricultural safety and health: the behavior of agricultural people. Behavior is key to risk taking and reduction of injuries, illness and fatalities as well as to improving the psychological well-being of the people who produce the essentials for life: food, fiber and renewable energy."*

--Dr. Michael Rosmann

The NORA program is divided into ten sector councils, each of which has responsibility for a particular occupational area. Each council develops an agenda that includes goals, performance measures and implementation plans.

### NORA Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Sector Council

There is one NORA sector council whose work is focused primarily on the occupations of agriculture, forestry and fishing. This sector council states:

"A goal of the NORA Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Sector Council is to identify the most salient needs of this diverse sector. We seek to support the most important research, understand the most effective intervention strategies, and learn how to implement those strategies to achieve sustained improvements in workplace practice." (NORA website)

This NORA sector council finalized a national agenda in December 2008 after considering public comments on the draft agenda. The completed product contains a series of strategic goals, intermediate goals and action steps that will serve to help guide the occupational health research and practices in the near future.

### Behavioral Health

Of particular interest to AgriWellness is the inclusion of behavioral health in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing national agenda. Strategic goal number five:

**"Improve the health and well-being of agricultural workers by reducing occupational causes or contributing factors to acute and chronic illness and disease."**

The agenda continues with an intermediate goal which focuses on behavioral health of agricultural populations:

**Intermediate Goal 5.5 - Develop and promote adoption of effective interventions to enhance psychological well-being of workers and to minimize the adverse effects of stressful agricultural working conditions (e.g., economic forces, weather, and isolation).**

Michael Rosmann, AgriWellness Executive Director, has been asked to chair the work group that will be responsible for implementation of this section of the strategic plan. The group will be considering the myriad factors that contribute to psychological stress for agricultural workers including inadequate time, fatigue, hazardous conditions and lack of control over certain conditions such as weather.

The work group will be developing performance measures and timeframes as guidelines for action steps that are already part of the strategic plan for this area. These action steps include:

Action step 5.5.1: Develop a surveillance system to help qualify the types and extent of psychological disorders experienced by agricultural workers. Use those findings to develop research priorities.

Action step 5.5.2: Conduct targeted research on factors associated with psychological disorders, especially as they relate to specific regional concerns or patterns.

Action step 5.5.3: Develop, implement and evaluate culturally appropriate educational and outreach programs for promoting psychological well-being of agricultural producers, farm workers and their families. Involve agricultural workers in their development and delivery.

There will be more information available about this important work in the future. If you have any comments, please send them to Dr. Rosmann at [mike@agriwellness.org](mailto:mike@agriwellness.org).

To read the entire NORA sector council document please visit here:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/nora/comment/agendas/AgForFish/>

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*We thank you for your consideration.*