People who work in agriculture are eight times more likely to be fatally injured when compared to other professions. It remains the most dangerous occupation in the U.S. Moreover, farms normally include homes and non-working bystanders (often children) who are also at risk. In fact, on average, two children are killed every week in farm-related incidents.

I grew up on a farm and ranch in Idaho, but I had no idea agriculture was so hazardous. Not until I joined the faculty at the National Farm Medicine Center (NFMC), Marshfield, Wisconsin, did I learn about these cringe-worthy statistics. My work now concentrates on how rural departments and community/training centers can rally together to improve the health and safety of American farmers and ranchers.

Farms and ranches are independent and often semi-isolated in rural areas. While agricultural health and safety experts offer many solutions to everyday hazards, they are too few and often too separated from rural communities to be the sole deliverers of this knowledge. That is why we must bring together trusted members of the nearby rural community and provide them with simple, effective ways they can assist their farming and ranching neighbors.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently funded our efforts to train rural firefighters and other responders in farm safety. This is a project we call “Rural Firefighter Delivering Agricultural Safety and Health,” or RF-DASH. I worked and lived in a fire department while I was in college, so when I joined the faculty at the National Farm Medicine Center (NFMC), Marshfield, Wisconsin, did I learn about these cringe-worthy statistics. My work now concentrates on how rural departments and community/training centers can rally together to improve the health and safety of American farmers and ranchers.

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aid knowledge within the context of farm work, e.g., compound fractures resulting from a fall from a silo ladder. Thus, the knowledge being shared is more relatable and realistic for the farmer, their workers and their family. Additionally, the training includes the strategies that would have prevented the need for first aid, e.g., in the example above, a harness and ladder cage. Visit www.extension.psu.edu/business/ag-safety/farm-emergencies/first-aid for more information.

In addition to the technical knowledge and use of tools, the course includes discussion and guidance in how to approach individual farmers and the farm community. Often, fire departments have prior experience here as well. As the project has progressed, we have found most departments feel they have a farmer-firefighter within their ranks who can lead a local initiative within their service area. Indeed, farmers who volunteer as emergency responders are likely to become the ideal trainees in the program. These individuals can help bridge the farming community and the local departments. Starting with family, friends, co-workers, fellow volunteers and neighbors are logical first steps. Additionally, farmer-firefighter cookouts, co-op meetings and twilight meetings are excellent opportunities for individual farmers and the fire department to emerge as leaders in a local initiative. Similarly, 4-H and FFA organizations can both engage and promote the activities.

Over the course of the next four years, we hope to see more rural emergency responders become leaders and practitioners of agricultural health and safety, eventually improving the industry nationwide.

Emergency first responders interested in becoming trainers may contact Bendixsen at the email address above. Find more information online (www.umash.umn.edu/portfolio/rural-firefighters-delivering-agricultural-safety-and-health-rfdash).

Farm MAPPER (Mapping to Assist, Protect and Prepare Emergency Responders) is an online, mobile-friendly web tool in its later stages of development. It will provide emergency responders with on-site information about hazards and physical layouts of agricultural operations.

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