THE PROBLEM:
There are more older workers in agriculture than in any other industry, with 1 in 3 U.S. farmers over 65 years old. The impacts of aging can make the hazardous environment of agricultural work even more dangerous.

OUR RESPONSE:
UMASH learned from aging farmers and their support systems that their biggest concerns about aging on the farm were accessing healthcare, managing stress and anxiety, maintaining balance and coordination, and preventing musculoskeletal injuries. UMASH responded to these concerns by partnering with innovative teams in the Upper Midwest:

AGING ON THE FARM PARTNER PROJECTS

University of Minnesota Occupational Therapy (OT)
facilitated virtual programming to five rural farmers across Minnesota to reduce pain, improve balance and mobility, and continue activities of daily living. OT students gained clinical experience working with rural farmers, designing two webinars for rural farmers to access on the UMASH website.

• This program introduced OT as a resource for farmers and shared practical tools and strategies to help farmers adapt to bodily changes while they age on the farm.
• 80% of farmers felt better able to manage changes related to aging after participating in the program.
• The webinars have been viewed by almost 100 website users and over 40 times on YouTube.

United Church of Christ Zumbrota and Normandale Center for Healing and Wholeness established a “Healthy Aging on the Farm” team of four faith-based organizations in a rural Minnesota county to ask farmers about their concerns about aging in place on the farm and how the community could best support them.

• Farmers shared their greatest challenges of aging on the farm: maintaining their overall health and mobility and finding help with chores.
• Having more help around the home and adapting their home to be safer, like installing handrails and ramps, would make aging at home easier for many farmers.
• This team plans to create a resource guide to increase the awareness and usage of programs already available in their communities for aging farmers.
Participants were motivated to engage in the program for many reasons, including "to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle" and "to live as normal for as long as possible with Parkinson’s."

The toolkit is currently in 30 homes across rural WI, with households sharing that the program and toolkit items were very beneficial in their daily lives.

Students working on the project gained valuable clinical and cultural skills working with rural farmers with Parkinson’s disease, preparing them well to work with future rural clients.

• Over 120 physicians, nurses, and community members were trained to improve the quality of care for older adults with dementia.

• The training built connections between healthcare providers and a local neuropsychologist, making diagnosing and referring patients to dementia care easier and quicker.

• Over 215 community members gathered for “memory loss cafes” to build community, share resources, and increase their understanding of dementia.

• 25 memory loss kits were checked out more than 80 times from a local library. The kits included items like toy tractors and farm magazines to reduce the anxiety of memory loss and bring back memories of life on the farm.