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Worker Health and Safety Needs Among Swine Producers in Minnesota and North Carolina

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Introduction Agriculture remains the second most dangerous US occupation, with a death rate slightly lower than mining. Farm workers in the livestock industry are exposed to an array of safety and health hazards that influence their potential for traumatic injury or work-related illness. We surveyed 600 swine producers in Minnesota and North Carolina to learn about their needs related to worker health and safety training and development of comprehensive plans for dealing with workplace safety and health.

General Information A mail survey assessing variables associated with producer demographics, injury and illness experience, and prevention strategies was sent to a randomly selected group of Minnesota (MN) and North Carolina (NC) producers. The sample was drawn from a National Hog Farmer Magazine subscriber list. Eligibility requirements included a sow herd greater than or equal to 200, and/or annual hog production of greater than or equal to 5000. A total of 79 MN producers responded with usable surveys (25.2% response rate) while 51 responded in NC (17.8%).

Illness/Injury History and Concerns A larger percentage of NC producers had experienced injuries and illnesses for most categories listed in the survey. For both states, cuts; back/neck injury/pain; needlesticks; strains/sprains/twists; and slips/falls were the types of injuries occurring with greatest frequency. Based on past literature, we were interested to learn that relatively few employers reported their workers experiencing respiratory illness in comparison to other problems (7.6% in MN and 5.9% in NC). In both states, employers

reported being “more concerned” about specific injury and illness problems after they had experienced an injury or illness.

Training Programs Provided by Employers Overall, fewer than half of the producers surveyed were providing planned training on specific health and safety topics. For example, 31.6% of the Minnesota employers were providing training on safe animal handling procedures compared with 49% in North Carolina. However, larger employers with more than 10 workers (the OSHA lower limit for compliance activities) reported more activity in planned worker training.

Preferred Topics and Delivery Mechanisms Employers were most interested in receiving information on topics that included basic safe animal handling procedures, first aid, back injury prevention, veterinary procedures, workers compensation cost control, and respiratory protection. In both states, veterinarians are viewed as highly credible and preferred sources of information. Other sources cited as being highly credible and preferred included various pork production magazines, other producers, the Extension service, insurance companies, and safety consultants. Producers wanted to receive information in the form of newsletters, pamphlets, magazines, videos and product inserts.