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## **Anthropologists could be key to improved farm safety**

Before recommending safety behavior changes to farmers, their families, and their employees, health and safety professionals should first walk in the boots of those who produce our food, say leading anthropologists writing in the current issue of [\*Journal of Agromedicine\*](#).

“The challenge is to translate our concepts of agricultural health and medicine into mechanisms of prevention that are culturally relevant and meaningful for the people we are trying to reach,” said Kendall Thu, Ph.D., Northern Illinois University, one of the first anthropologists to work in ag health and safety.

"Agri-CULTURAL Health and Safety: Anthropologists in the Field," features five research articles addressing the critical need to understand the communities at risk in agricultural work. Commentaries from Thu; Thomas Arcury, Ph.D., Wake Forest; and Kim Fortun, Ph.D., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; contextualize the history and future of anthropological research in the field, as well as how those experiences are useful to other disciplines.

Agriculture has a fatality rate that is eight times the average of all other industries in the United States. Migrant and seasonal farmworkers, in particular, are a vulnerable agricultural community who experience substantial occupational injury and illness.

“Too often those of us who work in health and safety puzzle over the fact that farmers do not promptly adopt the safer practices we recommend,” said Matthew Keifer, M.D., M.P.H., *Journal of Agromedicine* editor-in-chief. “Farmers are smart, creative, caring people, deeply invested in their work and families. But they work within constraints that may be invisible to us and which we must understand in order to be effective conveyers of safety practices. Anthropology can help us do just that.”

Anthropology is broadly defined as, “the study of human societies and cultures, and their development.” It encompasses the shared sets of values, attitudes, and behaviors that shape the collective order of any given society, and that also might provide pathways to safer and healthier behaviors.

Casper Bendixsen, Ph.D., a cultural anthropologist at the National Farm Medicine Center, Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation, served as guest editor for this special issue of the *Journal*.

“The *Journal of Agromedicine* is providing the first consolidated conversation about the hazards of agricultural work as social-cultural constructions,” Dr. Bendixsen said. “The insulation of farms from many federal and state policies allows them to be governed more by cultural attitudes than law. We need to have a meaningful understanding of these attitudes and agricultural hazards in order to encourage both voluntary acceptance and realistic policy that fosters safer and healthier farm life.”

Abstracts of each paper in the issue are available at the *Journal's* [web page](#). Please contact individual authors for full versions.

The National Farm Medicine Center has edited the *Journal of Agromedicine* since 2004. The *Journal* publishes peer-reviewed papers addressing the health and safety of agricultural populations in order to advance scientific dialog through practice, policy and research.

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