

National Children's Center Supports Youth Working in Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is proposing new rules regarding jobs that children can be hired to perform on farms and ranches. Although the official comment period ended December 1, public discussion continues as the DOL reviews more than 10,000 comments received via the federal register.

The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety supports the changes, which would apply to **hired** youth under 16 and would focus on jobs that research has shown to cause the most injuries and fatalities, such as tractor operation and certain types of work with animals. Children working on their family's farm would continue to be exempt from labor laws.

Working in agriculture is beneficial to youth on many levels, said Barbara Lee, Ph.D., director of the National Children's Center and National Farm Medicine Center, Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation, Marshfield, Wisconsin. The National Children's Center has long focused on promoting meaningful work experience for young people with less risk of farm related disease or injury. The center led development of two sets of landmark guidelines in consultation with agricultural employers and farm parents, as well as with safety and health specialists.

- North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT) (www.nagcat.org) were released in 1999 to help adults match children with appropriate jobs. The guidelines empower parents to assign jobs while taking into account the unique growth and development characteristics of each child.
- Safety Guidelines for Hired Adolescent Farm Workers (www.marshfieldclinic.org/saghaf) were published in 2009 to facilitate supervision and work assignments of hired teen workers. These guidelines came at the request of agricultural employers.

The National Children's Center and other supporters say the proposed DOL changes are modest and overdue, bringing agriculture closer in line with other industries. The proposed changes are based on a comprehensive evaluation conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which reported on its evaluation in 2002 and made recommendations concerning both non-agricultural and agricultural hazardous occupations orders (HOs). As a result of the report, regulations for non-agricultural HOs were revised and became effective in 2010.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the proposed rules, "respect the various ways that farms are structured in rural America, including partnerships and LLC's."

More information is available at the Department of Labor Web site, http://www.dol.gov/whd/CL/AG_NPRM.htm.