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AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY LEADERS TO HOLD FIRST SAFETY AND HEALTH CONFERENCE, JANUARY 2009

Leaders in farming, agribusiness, insurance, government and safety will convene January 28-29, 2009, in Washington, D.C., for the first national meeting of the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA).

The new Council, driven by farmer/rancher and agribusiness leaders, is the first of its kind in the U.S. to pursue a national strategy to reduce disease, injuries and fatalities in American agriculture.

The meeting will be held at American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) headquarters and the adjacent Holiday Inn Capitol. Bob Stallman, president of AFBF, will provide opening remarks. Invited speakers include Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, and Martin Lowery, Ph.D., National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Agricultural employment is among the most hazardous occupations in the United States, with a higher percentage of workers suffering lost-time injuries compared to other industries. Conservative estimates put the direct and indirect costs of farm-related injuries at more than \$5 billion each year. Due to its decentralized work environment and diverse structure, agriculture and its employers likely would benefit from more research into the development of improved safety and health interventions.

"What's encouraging is the combination of people coming together – farmers and ranchers, organizations that represent them, insurance companies, equipment companies – that all have this common interest and need," said William Nelson, CHS Foundation president and chair of ASHCA. "These people are coming from exceptional organizations and are extremely dedicated."

ASHCA charter members include: American Farm Bureau Federation, Association of Equipment Manufacturers, CHS Foundation, CropLife America,

Farm Foundation, Liberty Mutual, National Farm Medicine Center, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, National Pork Board and Workers Compensation Fund.

"At our January meeting we want to get a broader consensus from members on the directions that we will be taking in 2009-2010," said Dan Hair, senior vice-president of Worker's Compensation Fund and vice chair of ASHCA.

Said Marsha Purcell, Director of Program Development for the American Farm Bureau Federation and secretary-treasurer of ASHCA: "Our target audience is those working on farms and ranches. We want to help create a safer and healthier workplace through education and information."

The meeting will feature a panel discussion on "Critical Issues for Improving Agricultural Safety and Health at a National Level." Panelists will include ASHCA vice-chair Dan Hair, as well as Dennis Murphy, professor of agricultural safety and health, Penn State University; Bryan Little, chief operating officer, Farm Employers Labor Service, California; and Paul Gunderson, agricultural producer and director of the Dakota Center for Technology – Optimized Agriculture, Devils Lake, North Dakota.

To register for the meeting, or for more information, go to www.ashca.org or contact Regina Fisher at 715-221-7270, fisher.regina@mcrf.mfldclin.edu.