

# No Kidding!

## Who puts the culture into agriculture? Farmers

Connie J. Perkins, PhD, RN, CNE

I have always lived in rural America and consider rural nursing a personal passion and specialty in many regards. If you want to know a dirty little secret of mine: I actually live in rural Pennsylvania in a town with one blinking red light and no cell phone service...and I like it that way! I am active in this group because I practice in New York. Where I work is also rural, but to me feels like working in the big city given that it has cell phone service and a Walmart (it doesn't take much to impress me). The populations I serve and teach about are vulnerable and medically underserved. I have always thought about the multitude of barriers rural populations face-transportation, access to technology, healthcare cost- often before guessing their diagnosis or considering what I need next for their treatment plan. That way of thinking didn't blossom from my nursing education, but because of how I grew up. My Dad had his own business building log homes that often didn't pay the bills. We went without health insurance from time to time and when we hurt our ankle in gym class, we just borrowed the family crutches for a few days rather than visiting the emergency room. This was an inherited life skill passed down from his parents, who owned a dairy farm. Given my roots (see what I did there?), I have always been interested in learning more about the agricultural community and how I can help them address the unique barriers they face daily. To continue to feed that interest and prepare our nursing students to care for vulnerable populations, I recently completed the AgriSafe Nurse Scholar program resulting in nursing continuing education (CE) credits and a digital badge (figure 1). This program was 23 hours of coursework that focused on "...prevention, identification, and assessment of

diseases and conditions commonly experienced by people working in agriculture" (AgriSafe Network, n.d., para. 1). After completing all of the sessions, my biggest take-away is that farming is a culture in itself. Culture is defined as "...the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" (Merriam-Webster, 2024, para. 1). For agriculture producers, their work is their way of life and part of their often-inherited ways of thinking. Their work doesn't just define their 9 to 5 each day, it defines each and every day, evening, and night. It is part of their heritage and engrained (also a pun) in their decision-making processes. Here are my favorite take-aways from my training that I hope you consider, if you ever get the honor to care for them:

- The average age children raised on farms drive tractors is 10 years old. With almost 30% driving independently by 7-9 years old.
- 38.7% of American farmers are women and 9% are run entirely by women.
- A commonly used pesticide category to protect crops are cholinesterase inhibitors, so too much exposure may lead to depression.
- 50% of all tractor-related deaths involve extra riders. Children raised on farms are often with parents in the field due to work being at home and home being at work.
- The average family farm does not have a health and safety program like commercial entities, so OSHA doesn't have a routine presence to dictate every day safety practices.
- The rate of hearing loss among farmers is higher than any other occupation at 72%. A pig squeal is almost as loud as a chainsaw, so it isn't just the farmers working with machinery that suffer oc-



**Figure 1**  
Earned badge for completing the program

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cupation related hearing loss or need to wear ear protection.

- Work gloves worn to complete many tasks on a farm come in sizes, which should be measured by hand width not just trying them on. Not having the right fit puts farmers at risk for injury.

I hope you leave this column wanting to pause during your next admission assessment when your patient reports their occupation as an agricultural worker. I hope you now consider this occupation as a culture and consider ways nurses can help this unique population maintain their health and safety.

It has been a privilege to write this column and I hope you have appreciated my jokes as much as I've enjoyed writing them for you. No kidding! ■

### References

- AgriSafe Network (n.d.). Nurse scholar. <https://www.agrisafe.org/courses/nurse-scholar/>
- Merriam-Webster (2024). Culture. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture#:~:text=%3A%20the%20customary%20beliefs%2C%20social%20forms,in%20a%20place%20or%20time>