

## **Tempering Anticipation With Safety at Harvest**

*By Cyndie Sirekis*

The fall harvest season brings with it a noticeable air of anticipation for consumers as well as pride and excitement for farmers and ranchers. Apples, pumpkins, squash, onions, potatoes, turnips, leeks and many other types of produce, in addition to the “cereal grains” (rice, wheat, oats, barley, rye, sorghum and millet) are harvested and brought in from the fields at this time of year.

Crops such as corn and soybeans grown primarily to feed cattle, hogs, chickens and other livestock as well as for renewable fuels, also are ripe and ready for harvest, along with cotton and other natural fibers.

Harvest at the right time is critical for all types of crops, whether they will be eaten by people or animals. The challenging part for those who grow crops is that everything tends to ripen at once. And all too often, severe weather with its dark promise of destruction looms.

For these and myriad other reasons, the window of time to successfully complete harvest on the farm, ranch or orchard can be severely compressed, throwing a carefully planned schedule into hyper-drive.

On the cusp of the season, with mechanical harvesting equipment the norm on today’s modern operations, this year’s National Farm Safety & Health Week (Sept. 20-26) focus on increasing awareness of rural road safety precautions is especially appropriate.

“Rural Roadway Safety...Alert, Aware & Alive,” the slogan of the week, draws attention to the fact that most motor vehicle—ag equipment collisions are preventable through recognition of roadway hazards by both farm machinery operators and other drivers.

In Illinois, during this week the “Meals in the Field” program sponsored by Farm Credit Services will provide complimentary lunches for 100 farm families, delivered to the location of their choice, wherever they happen to be working.

Sounds nice, but what’s the connection to safety on rural roads? It’s simple—research shows driver fatigue is a leading cause of highway collisions. Several hours of early morning field work followed by a hurried drive back home or into town for a mid-day meal on rural roads with other drivers not familiar with harvesting equipment could be a recipe for disaster for all involved.

Hats off to Meals in the Field and the many agricultural safety and health professionals in rural communities across America who work to creatively combat a sobering truth: agriculture remains among the most dangerous occupations in America.

Safety and health education efforts aimed at farm and ranch families as well as the non-farming public continue year-round, with special emphasis during harvest and planting. Next spring, members of the Farm Bureau Safety & Health Network will remind farmers and ranchers about what they can do to step up their efforts to prevent ag-related injuries as planting season approaches.