

Sun Exposure and Skin Cancer Are Important Issues in Agricultural Health

Mary Lou Courregé

To the Editor—I recently ran across the Agricultural Health (November/December 2011) issue of the NCMJ as I was clearing off my desk. Reading back through it, I was hoping and expecting to find a discussion of sun damage and skin cancer among farm workers. I found the sun mentioned only a few times and skin cancer discussed in just one paragraph of the entire issue (p. 485). While I certainly understand the importance of all the other issues presented (accidents, pesticides, other chemical exposure, infection, etc.), I expected to see more extensive information regarding sun exposure and the prevention of sun-related problems.

As a dermatologist living and practicing medicine in Eastern North Carolina since 1987, I have seen and treated many farmers for skin cancers. This is particularly true among small, family-operated farms where the families have Celtic heredity. My aim (besides treating the skin cancer) has been to educate my patients about protective measures (physical protection, hats, and sunscreen) to prevent future problems. Most of the time, I am just addressing problems that occur secondarily to past chronic sun exposure.

So often, these patients have worked on a farm their

entire lives and were not aware of the damage to fair skin over time. Many do not think they need sunscreen in the winter, and some think they do not need it at all!

I urge health care professionals working with farm workers to include sun protection and skin cancer education and treatment as part of their day-to-day work. Free health screenings, such as the Healthy Living for a Lifetime Initiative (discussed in the issue), are great venues for dermatologists to evaluate for sun-damage and the presence of skin cancer and pre-cancerous lesions among farm workers. **NCMJ**

Mary Lou Courregé, MD Wilmington, North Carolina.

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Address correspondence to Dr. Mary Lou Courregé, 986 Birch Creek Dr, Wilmington, NC 28403.

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