

Farmers' Adoption of Health and Safety Practices in Trinidad

Wayne G. Ganpat

University of the West Indies

Circular Road

St. Augustine

Trinidad

P: 662 2002 ext 83204

wayne.ganpat@sta.uwi.edu

Lendel Narine

University of the West Indies

Tessa Barry

University of the West Indies

Keywords: Health, Safety, Adoption, Farmers, Food Security

Introduction

Agriculture ranks as a top hazardous industry, workers are subjected to higher risks of fatal and non-fatal injuries as well as occupational diseases (CDC 2013). There are approximately 20,000 farmers in Trinidad and most are above 50 years old (ECLAC 2013). These farmers will continue to be the backbone of the industry as younger persons are slow to enter the sector. For sustainable food production and national food security, actions must be engaged to maintain health and safety of farmers on farm. No study has been done in the farming sector to understand the status of Trinidad farmers' health and safety adoption.

Purpose

This study seeks to (i) determine the adoption of health and safety practices on farm and (ii) identify the factors that impact adoption.

Methodology

One hundred farmers were surveyed in ten most populated agricultural pockets in Trinidad using a structured questionnaire. Some 14 statements were used to determine farmers' practice adoptions towards reducing/preventing occupational accidents, injuries and diseases. The scale (14 items) had good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$). Descriptive and ANOVA results are presented.

Results

Characteristics of Farmers: The majority of respondents were males (82%), older (45-70 years) had attained secondary level education (58%), were farm owners (65%), were experienced in farming (63% had >10 years). The majority of farmers (72%) did not reside on the farm premises, and worked >6 hours per day on the farm (83%). Some 67% reported that they were visited by extension officers, of which the majority (95%) reported monthly visits or less. Some 53% of the farmers stated that they were not familiar with the health and safety issues in agriculture.

Farmers' Practice Adoptions to Reduce/Prevent Occupational Accidents, Injuries and Diseases: Mean frequencies showed that 38% of farmers always took precautions to reduce/prevent occupational health and safety hazards; 33% of farmers sometimes took precautions and 22% of farmers never took precautions. This suggested that farmers' practice adoptions were fairly good.

Farmers best practices were in certain areas, *"I immediately contact the relevant authorities if an accident/emergency occurs"* (83% of farmers always took precautions) and to reduce/prevent ergonomic hazards, *"I try my best to work in comfortable positions"* (60% of farmers sometimes took precautions). Farmers had poor practice adoptions to reduce/prevent physical (sun) hazards, as evident by the statement, *"I wear protective clothing when working in the sun"* (54% of farmers never took precautions).

Relationships with Farmers' Practice Adoption Scores

Farmers' adoption scores were impacted by age of farmer, role on the farm and if visits were received by Extension. In summary, Tukey's b post hoc test indicated that older farmers >31 years undertook significantly more precautions to reduce/prevent occupational accidents, injuries, and diseases than farmers between the ages of 18-30. For job role on-farm, Tukey's b post hoc test confirmed that farm owners undertook significantly more precautions to prevent/reduce occupational accidents, injuries, and diseases than family workers and hired labourers. Also, Tukey's b post hoc test confirmed that farmers who were visited by extension officers undertook significantly more precautions to prevent/reduce occupational accidents, injuries, and diseases than farmers who were never visited by extension officers. Mean practice adoption scores did not significantly differ with gender, frequency of visits by extension officers and farmers' familiarity with health and safety issues in agriculture.

Conclusion

The overall level of adoption of health and safety practices on farm, although fairly good, is not acceptable given the aged farm population. Younger farmers do not engage in sufficient safety practices and hired help practised least safety practices on farm.

Recommendations

The adoption of health and safety practices on farm needs to be improved. Extension agents need to be trained to in health and safety issues to be able to educate farmers. They should visit farms more frequently and have a formal set of guidelines that lists best practices for farmers to follow. Extension should target younger farmers and persuade them to improve farm safety habits to ensure good health into the future. Farm owners need to know that they have responsibility for their hired help and ensure that they are also educated and outfitted to practise health and safety.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013. "Agriculture." Accessed September 15, 2013. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/agriculture/>.
- ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) 2004. *Population Ageing in the Caribbean: An Inventory of Policies, Programmes and Future Challenges*. Santiago: United Nations.