

Farmers should make a skin check a priority

Farming has plenty of challenges, but probably one of the hazards that farmers worry about the least are the dangers from working in the sun year-round. As the harvest concludes and winter sets in, farmers should pay attention to the condition of their skin.

"More than 11,000 Americans die each year from skin cancer," says Dr. David M. Pariser, a dermatologist and president of the American Academy of Dermatology. "But when detected early, skin cancer has a cure rate of 99 percent. Since research shows farmers are among the least likely workers to receive a skin examination by a physician, it's important that farmers perform regular skin self-examinations, which could mean the difference between life and death."

It's as easy as "ABC" to remember how you can identify a mole or lesion that needs the attention of a dermatologist:

- Asymmetry (one half is unlike the other)
- Border (irregular, scalloped or poorly defined)
- Color (varies from one area to another)
- Diameter (the size of a pencil eraser or larger)
- Evolving (changing in size, shape or color)

To help farmers minimize their risk of skin cancer, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends that everyone Be Sun Smart:

- * Use water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30 on all exposed skin, before heading out to the field or pasture. Re-apply approximately every two hours, even on cloudy days.
- * Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.
- * Stay in the shade when possible, and make sure your tractor has a sun umbrella. The sun's rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- * If working near water, snow or sand, seek extra shade because these surfaces reflect the sun's rays and increase your chance of sunburn.
- * Look at your skin after each harvest. Ask a partner to help. If you notice any moles or spots changing, growing or bleeding, make an appointment to see a dermatologist.

The Academy offers a downloadable Body Mole Map with information on how to perform a skin exam and images of the ABCDEs of melanoma. The mole map is available at www.aad.org/checkspot. The site also has information on how to find a free cancer screening from a dermatologist in your area.

Performing a skin self-exam requires regularly looking over the entire body, including the back, scalp, soles of the feet and between the toes, and on the palms. It is important to use both a full-length mirror and a hand-held mirror to see the scalp, back and buttocks.

For more information about skin cancer, visit the SkinCancerNet section of www.SkinCarePhysicians.com.