

Redesigned Agricultural Health Study website launched

By Kelly Lenox

The [Agricultural Health Study](http://aghealth.nih.gov/)
(<http://aghealth.nih.gov/>)

(AHS) website was recently redesigned for easier navigation and to be responsive to the user's platform, whether mobile or desktop. The new design was intended to promote use of study findings, assist potential collaborators, and energize participation.

In 1993, before the Internet was widely used, AHS began its study on how agricultural, lifestyle, and genetic factors affect the health of farming populations. More than 89,000 farmers and their spouses in Iowa and North Carolina have been involved in AHS since its inception.

A collaborative effort between NIEHS, the National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, AHS was designed to offer unique opportunities for researchers interested in helping farmers and their families live healthier lives. The study continues to advance understanding of links between pesticides and human health (see [text box](#)).

Designed with users in mind

In the years since 2001, when the first study website was launched, the need for a redesign became increasingly evident. The site architecture was out-of-date and the site navigation needed simplifying. NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison (OCPL) staff spearheaded the site redesign, ensuring review of content by all four agencies involved.

One of the guiding principles was to make the site more usable to a wide range of users, from farmers to scientists to the general public. Meeting that challenge involved close cooperation between NIEHS and counterparts at NCI, including AHS researchers from the NCI Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, and contractors.

"In redesigning the website, we sought to strike the appropriate balance between being informative to scientists and understandable to the public," said [Dale Sandler, Ph.D.](#), head of the NIEHS Epidemiology Branch and lead of the Chronic Disease Epidemiology Group.

Visual elements were an important focus as well, according to Cheryl Thompson, NIEHS Web manager. "We wanted the site to be engaging and to feel trustworthy, so site visitors would know they were in the right place. We used themes related to agriculture, which weren't evident in the old site."

Even more noteworthy, the new site adapts to a variety of browsing platforms. "One of the novel features of the site design is that it is responsive, so that it works on tablets and mobile devices, as well as it does on desktops," said Joe Poccia, NIEHS Web information development specialist. "You don't usually see that on a government website - we're really at the forefront, as far as I can tell, in making all NIEHS websites responsive."



Smartphone users now have full access to the site, in a readable, easily navigated format.



Poccia was key in working with stakeholders, to ensure usability of the new site by the various users AHS researchers seek to reach. "It was a collaborative effort," he said. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



According to Thompson, NIEHS reviewed content on the old site and made recommendations to researchers about elements that should be retained, updated, or archived. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Sandler partnered with NCI in 1990 to develop AHS, and in the years since, expanded its focus to include non-cancer outcomes. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Diabetes among wives of farmers

In one of the latest findings from the Ag Health Study, NIEHS researchers and colleagues reported further evidence of an association between specific organochlorine pesticides and diabetes. In addition, the study added to growing evidence that certain organophosphate pesticides may increase risk of diabetes.

This paper is among the hundreds of papers listed on the new Ag Health website - evidence of the increasing body of knowledge AHS contributes to medical science.

Citation: [Starling AP, Umbach DM, Kamel F, Long S, Sandler DP, Hoppin JA.](#)

[\(http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24727735\)](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24727735)

2014. Pesticide use and incident diabetes among wives of farmers in the Agricultural Health Study. *Occup Environ Med*; doi:10.1136/oemed-2013-101659 [Online 12 April 2014].

The Environmental Factor is produced monthly by the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](#)

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