Preventing Pesticide Exposure to Farmworker Families in the United States

LEAF (Limiting Exposures Around Families) Program Design

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Project Goals
1) Reach a total of 25,000 farmworker family members through take-home pesticide exposure education. The target goal for each year of the five-year cooperative agreement (March 2010-March 2015) is to train 5,000 farmworker family members.
2) Add two new Project LEAF training operating sites each year of the agreement through 2015.
3) Complete training design and curriculum for Spanish language “Train the Trainer.”

Program and Training Design
Project LEAF was designed for farmworkers’ specific needs as a largely immigrant and low-literacy population. Parents in farm work need practical advice on limiting their children’s exposure to pesticides. AFOP created several activities, including guided visualizations and demonstrations to accompany the low-literacy curriculum for the program. Easy to use tools that remind participants of Project LEAF’s key messages were developed as take-home materials they can take home to reinforce training, including colorful brochures and washing machine magnets. Trainings generally last 30-45 minutes in order to respect the busy schedules of farmworker parents and facilitate retention of the key concepts.

Dialogue between trainers and participants create brainstorming opportunities for adults to reflect on their daily routines and make healthier choices. For example, washing work clothes separate from family clothes (including what is referred to colloquially by trainers as “ropa dormiранa” or Sunday clothes, a cultural reference used by farmworkers to describe their work clothing reserved for church on Sundays), changing work clothes before hugging children, and refraining from taking agricultural pesticides and their containers home are several suggestions in the training.

The majority of Project LEAF trainers hired by AFOP are native speakers or fluent in Spanish in order to best communicate the material in the language predominantly spoken by farmworkers. While the curriculum for the trainers was originally designed in English, the need quickly arose for a Spanish “Train the Trainer” to equip educators and convey messages in the language in which most trainees are more comfortable. A curriculum is being designed in Spanish for trainers, enabling them to understand the health effects of pesticides in Spanish as well as providing advice on developing their own training techniques.

Curriculum Design
AFOP staff and five experts from its member organizations with in-depth knowledge in pesticide safety education from California, Indiana, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington created the curriculum collectively; they had over 90 years of experience. A children’s literature artist with Latina audiences was hired to depict the Soto family, a fictitious farmworker family learning about the dangers of take-home pesticide exposure, in the curriculum materials. The training curriculum was then field tested and modified through focus groups in 2009. Project LEAF’s training materials—including a portable flip chart and paper materials for trainers to take home—are approved by the EPA’s Office of Pesticide Programs.

The following messages form the basis for the low-literacy, bilingual, interactive curriculum design of Project LEAF:
- Children are not little adults. Pediatric medical literature suggests that many physical and behavioral characteristics of children distinguish them from adults, making them more vulnerable to environmental exposures. Trainers emphasize with farmworker parents how children’s bodies undergo rapid development in their early years. Their curiosity, short distance from the ground, and tendency to place objects in their mouth create an increased opportunity for contact with pesticide residues.
- Many studies have detected residues from agricultural pesticides on farmworkers’ clothing, skin, and work shoes. AFOP’s Project LEAF trainers use a number of interactive activities to demonstrate to parents that pesticide residues do matter, in fact, travel very easily from the field to their homes.

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Sources


For a complete list of sources and a free copy of Dangerous Exposure (2011), communicate with AFOP staff through the contact information listed below.