



From the Editor¹

Dennis Murphy²

Just what the world needs – another new journal! I must confess that I have often reacted exactly in this manner when a new journal advertisement crosses my desk. Although I really haven't kept track of how many have crossed my desk recently, I know it's only a small fraction of the over 3,600 new journals that have begun since 1992 (Ulrich's International Periodical's Directory, 1994). Still, the number is many more than I have time to read, and far exceeds the financial resources I have for purchasing journal subscriptions. With the number of scientific journals doubling about every 15 years (Sidney & Diodato, 1993), I suspect many others, too, find themselves overwhelmed by the vastness of the potentially available literature in their professional field of practice.

So, why did I accept the challenge of helping to get a new journal off the ground? And why have so many others, literally a few hundred of you, seemingly jumped at the chance to personally support this new journal by offering to serve as associate editors, editorial board members, technical reviewers, authors, and subscribers? Let me suggest at least a couple of answers to these questions. In so doing, I hope to briefly identify why a journal like this has sprung forth and what we hope to accomplish.

New journals are formed, in part, in an attempt to corral one omnipresent need of professionals: to efficiently keep pace on the information superhighway. The uniqueness of agriculture, from a hazard and injury prevention and control perspective, suggests that our scientific information must come from, and be integrated

into, several basic and applied scientific disciplines. Prominent among these are agriculture, engineering, public health, medicine, public policy, the safety sciences and the social sciences. Given that there are several sub disciplines within each of these major fields of practice, it is no wonder that we often feel as though we are about to be run over by a technical information high speed train. Arming ourselves with pertinent, scientific information for facing this challenge is, of course, a primary purpose for a scientific journal.

But the important question is still to be answered. Why not just publish in existing journals, particularly in other agricultural journals? One answer, I believe, is grounded in practicalness. From a practical perspective, efficiency is the key word. Important contributions to our literature are coming from many different disciplines: authors tend to publish in venues most closely associated with their major discipline. Kim Witte, a communications researcher, provides a good example of this. Her journal article (Witte et al, 1993) is directly relevant to agricultural safety and health education professionals and was published in a community health journal. I strongly suspect that many traditional farm safety educators, such as agricultural engineering extension safety specialists, are unaware of this article. The Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health (JASH) will provide a more viable opportunity for authors to publish in a journal that more closely matches subject matter to a targeted professional group whom have common informational needs.

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1. This document was extracted from the Journal of Ag Safety and Health (Volume 1, Number 1, February 1995).
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The Journal of Ag Safety and Health is an interdisciplinary, refereed journal designed to foster identification and discussion of the issues of agricultural safety and health. The American Society of Agricultural Engineers is not responsible for statements and opinions advanced in its meetings or printed in its publications; they represent the views of the individuals to whom they are credited and are not binding on the society as a whole.

The practical advantages of having one journal that can closely match subject matter with interested professionals also includes financial and time management efficiencies. A speciality journal, such as JASH, limits the number of different journals practicing professionals need to subscribe to or spend time reviewing. These are not inconsequential considerations. To stay up-to-date, today's professionals in agricultural safety and health must monitor a score of journals that perhaps only sporadically contain articles of interest. Presently, the range of journals where pertinent agricultural safety and health articles are appearing has gone beyond what many professionals (or their employers) can handle.

Another reason that publishing in a variety of existing journals is less than sufficient has to do with advancing the state-of-the-art of agricultural safety and health. A peer reviewed journal is a principle means of binding together the theory, concepts, knowledge, practices, etc., that identifies, characterizes, and advances a professional field of practice. A journal devoted to this task provides the mechanism to bring together the critical mass of thought that, collectively, helps to illuminate a field of practice's past, present and future. This benefits everyone in society that has a stake in agricultural safety and health.

It is perhaps inevitable that a new journal would be proposed by professionals working in agricultural safety and health as they struggle to advance the science and art of this practice. As a focused field of practice, agricultural safety and health began in the early 1940s (Murphy, 1992). Most of its earliest professional practitioners were agricultural engineers. While they are still well represented, the discipline base of professional practitioners in agricultural safety and health has expanded considerably during the intervening years to include agricultural educators, hygienists, veterinarians, ergonomists, epidemiologists, public health practitioners, physicians, insurance risk managers, and others.

The richness of the approaches to advancing agricultural safety and health by those practicing in these diverse disciplines is matched only by the divergence of views and opinions on: how to define core issues; set priorities for remedial actions; and formulate effective intervention strategies. While disparate views and approaches are always healthy, at some point too much fragmentation becomes counter-productive to the common cause. A specialty journal provides a common venue for bringing together the diverse disciplines that are now contributing to advancing the state-of-the-art of agricultural safety and health.

The JASH endeavors to provide a scholarly home for professionals from around the world to discuss agricultural safety and health. To facilitate this goal we intend to stay flexible and allow ourselves to evolve and grow as the needs of our readers become better known to us. We welcome original research projects, evaluations of current intervention and demonstration projects, literature reviews that shed new light on a subject, the application of new or modified theories and models to agricultural safety and health problems, critical commentaries, editorials on current issues, and other scholarly contributions. Feel free to write us with your suggestions and comments.

And now, we begin.