Local agriculture leaders in the community serve as the actors for the Farmers’ Dinner Theater. The scripts describe actual farm experiences.

Cooperative Extension and the College of Nursing Conducted Farmers’ Dinner Theater to Address Health and Safety among Aging Farmers

Over 52% of farm couples who attend the dinner theater adopted a recommended practice or behavior within two weeks following the event and over 60% made a change within two months.
According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, the average age of U.S. farmers is 58.3 years old. As people age their health begins to change. Older farmers are at a higher risk for fatal injuries. When approached by the College of Nursing to be part of a research project to improve health and safety of farmers, the Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) agent in Casey County quickly realized the importance of this unique program.

Dr. Deborah Reed, a certified Agricultural Health Nurse, conducted research and has extensive experience with the health and safety needs of farmers. After conducting focus groups, she designed the dinner theater concept. Farmers indicated they did not want a piece of paper or a dry lecture. Dr. Reed scripted four skits based on actual farm experiences with a blend of humor. The skits sometimes vary according to the farming community. The major topics of hearing loss, arthritis, stress, multitasking and injury, and communication are included in all the theater presentations. Local agriculture leaders volunteered to be actors for the diner theater. Following each of the four skits, Dr. Reed led the audience in an open discussion about the issues presented.

Casey, Lincoln and Montgomery County Extension Services hosted the Farmer’s Dinner Theater in 2017. The target audience was farm couples that were age 45 and over. Surveys conducted two weeks following the event showed immediate changes, with even more changes noted after two months. Changes include improved safety features on equipment (i.e. roll bar), wore earplugs, visited medical professionals (i.e. check of hearing, skin cancer, arthritis, or stress), wore a seat belt, surveyed cell phone reception on all parts of their farm and created a system of reporting in throughout the day.

Dr. Reed collaborated with the Family and Consumer Sciences and Agriculture and Natural Resource agents to conduct the event in Lincoln County in 2017.

The Farmers’ Dinner Theater Tool Kit, created by Dr. Reed, will be available in 2018. The tool kit enables Extension offices and agriculture organizations to plan and conduct similar programs in their county. The format of role-play and oral traditions on specific topics is an effective intervention to improve health and safety of older farmers. Similar programs are being considered for farm families under the age of forty-five.