

The Sunny Side
By Nancy Trzcinski
NYFB State Promotion & Education Committee

As we go into the summer season and focus on fieldwork, all farmers and their families will be exposed to increased amounts of sunshine. The sun helps build vitamin D, makes us feel better emotionally and helps some skin conditions. The sun also ages you, wrinkles you and gives you skin cancer. All farmers have cumulative sun exposure over many years. This type of damage can lead to precancerous lesions and even skin cancer. It is important to protect your skin now to minimize those risks.

We have many tools in our toolboxes. Hats, protective clothing, sunglasses and sunscreen are all tools that should be used in order to protect and prevent damage to your skin.

Protective clothing with sunblock built into the fibers is one of our newer tools. Many companies are now making this type of clothing that are light weight and cool. They are worth the investment.

Hats are paramount to protecting the face, ears, eyes, lips, nose and neck. A baseball type hat doesn't protect these areas and they are the areas where skin cancers commonly develop. Wear a hat with a 2 – 3 inch brim all the way around. That will give you the best protection for those high-risk areas. If you can stand it, a shade cloth off the back of the hat will protect your neck best.

Sunglasses that block 99-100% of UVA and UVB radiation are also necessary tools. Large frames that wrap around the head are best. Long hours in the sun without sunglasses can increase your risk of developing cataracts and melanoma.

Sunscreens are needed to help protect your skin. The sun-protection factor (SPF) number is the amount of protection from the sun. You want to choose a sunscreen with broad spectrum protection. This helps against UVA and UVB. The number indicates how much of the rays are filtered out. An SPF of 50 filters out about 98% of the rays. Use 1 ounce of sunscreen (think shot-glass or 2 tablespoons) and reapply every 2 hours or as the label of your sunscreen recommends. Sunscreen is only active on your skin for that short a time. There are lotions, creams and sprays. Just remember to use them.

Your protection from the sun is only as good as the tools in your toolbox.

Nancy Trzcinski has been a nurse practitioner for 20 years and married to a farmer for 30. She has been in dermatology for 10 years and this march took and passed the National Certification Exam for Dermatology Nurse Practitioners. She talks to and teaches patients every day and hopes that this article is a teachable moment for conditions that can affect our unique agricultural population.