FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 26, 2015

CONTACT: Scott Heiberger
heiberger.scott@mcrf.mfldclin.edu
715-389-7541

National Farm Medicine Center hosts two student interns

The National Farm Medicine Center hosted two students as part of a national summer internship program providing practical experience in the field of occupational safety.

Elizabeth Steiner, Boston College, and Katherine Zielke, a recent graduate of Emory University, spent eight weeks at the Farm Center, a program of Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation, Marshfield, Wis. They worked primarily on Seguridad en las Lecherias (Safety in Dairies), a project that is testing culturally appropriate occupational safety and health training for immigrant dairy workers.

Steiner and Zielke came to the Farm Center as part of the Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP), an initiative of the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics http://aoec.org/ohip/. Competition for internships was keen, with just 30 positions nationwide for more than 400 applicants.

Steiner is entering her junior year at Boston College, where she is majoring in theology and Hispanic studies. Zielke recently graduated from Emory University with a master’s degree in public health. Zielke also is a registered nurse.

Both Steiner and Zielke have Wisconsin ties. Steiner’s father, Robert Steiner, MD, is director of Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation. Zielke received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

“It is our second year of hosting young scholars interested in working on the health and safety of farming populations,” said Matthew Keifer, MD, MPH, director of the National Farm Medicine Center. “They contribute a great deal of new and fresh ideas. We always hope that young scholars such as Libbie and Kat benefit from their experience here as much as we benefit from their presence.”

Marshfield was the only rural location among eight training sites nationwide, and Seguridad was the only project focused specifically on agricultural safety and health among 15 projects.
“OHIP provides a unique opportunity for us to train the next generation of public health professionals, especially those who have not been exposed to occupational health and safety or agriculture during their coursework,” said Farm Center Epidemiologist Iris Reyes, MPH, who coordinated the work of Steiner and Zielke.

The design and testing of Seguridad en las Lecherias is a collaboration of the Farm Center, Migrant Clinicians Network and the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, which provides funding through a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

In just eight short weeks, Steiner and Zielke conducted Hispanic dairy worker safety training, administered surveys to farmers and workers, entered surveys onto the Farm Center’s database and analyzed the data. They also developed a resource guide/map of social services available in Wisconsin for English and Spanish-speaking workers.

Steiner and Zielke presented results of their internship during a national Occupational Health Internship Program videoconference on August 7.

In addition, Zielke has received a scholarship to present her experience with the Seguridad project at the American Public Health Association meeting, Oct. 31-Nov. 4, in Chicago.

“Visiting farms and evaluating data gave me great insight into the incredible complexity of managing a farm,” Zielke said, “as well as the occupational hazards and obstacles that farmworkers face, especially immigrant farmworkers.”

Steiner said she didn’t know quite what to expect coming in, but that she leaves with, “a rekindled passion for farmworker and immigrant justice, an understanding of occupational health challenges in agriculture, and an appreciation of the diligence of people who work every day to produce our food.”

For information on the National Farm Medicine Center, go to http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/nfmc.

###