Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, through their National Farmworker Job’s Program, hosted their second Human Trafficking Awareness Conference on March 7 and 8 in their capital city of Pierre, South Dakota. The conference commenced with the Secretary of Labor and Regulation, Marcia Hultman, who provided information on services available to all individuals through the Department of Labor to support and assist individuals with education, training and employment. Secretary Hultman introduced South Dakota’s Governor, Kristi Noem. Governor Noem was South Dakota’s sole representative in the United States of Representatives prior to her inauguration in January. During her time in congress, Governor Noem championed the decade’s most comprehensive anti-trafficking initiative that enhanced law enforcement tools, better supported intervention programs, and provided additional resources to survivors.

The list of conference presenters was impressive. Representation included:

- Computer Forensic Examiner, Internet Crimes Against Children;
- Directors of anti-trafficking organizations based in both Eastern and Western South Dakota;
- Supervisory Special Agent with the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation;
- Assistant United States Attorney who prosecutes traffickers;
- Attorney and Director for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment;
- Director of Advocacy and Prevention who oversees investigations of child abuse cases;
- Director of Children and Youth Services for a non-profit; and
- A survivor of sex trafficking from South Dakota who was trafficked in South Dakota.

A few responses from the attendees regarding the conference:
“I found the information given to me, although uncomfortable and disturbing, was a wake-up call that was needed!”

“Very eye opening. We think because we live in a safe rural community that this DOES NOT happen here. Terrifying and we all need to do better to find these victims and stop trafficking.”

“The knowledge gained about trafficking. How vulnerable children are victimized.”

“Kelly’s story made trafficking relevant to find out this is right here in SD. Wow!”

When asked what they might do differently, personally and/or professionally, as a result of this conference, attendees said the following:

❖ “Pay closer attention always. Staying current on issues and bring these speakers in (to our agency).”
❖ “Share the information with family, neighbors, and professional colleagues. Seek to find out what resources are in place in my community.”
❖ “Warn parents of the dangerous apps on the smart phones that their children use.”
❖ “Professionally, I have more awareness of what to look for and maybe refer a victim to the correct safe agencies.”
❖ “I will be more aware of social media and how that can make kids unsafe. I will educate my DSS office regarding human sex trafficking and how we can look for the signs and ensure kids are safe.”

The conference was a huge success. Next year, BHSSC hopes to focus the third annual conference on labor trafficking, particular in regards to the agricultural industry.