

Farming with Arthritis

Arthritis, a condition that can reduce strength and mobility for completing routine chores, is a pain to farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers. Arthritis is one of the most common disabling conditions, and it especially affects farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers due to the physical nature of their work, which may include climbing steps, driving a tractor, baling hay, moving livestock, or bending down frequently when milking dairy cows.

The term arthritis refers to more than 100 different ailments known as rheumatic diseases. The most common types are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, bursitis, and tendonitis.

Osteoarthritis causes the breakdown of the smooth, gliding surface of a joint, known as cartilage. When cartilage is destroyed, raw bone surfaces rub together and the bone ends may thicken and form bony overgrowth called spurs.

For farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers frequent lifting of heavy objects, repeated use of vibrating machinery or constant bending to perform certain tasks can add to the stress on joints and set the stage for osteoarthritis, particularly of weight-bearing joints.

Many everyday tasks that were once simple are now painful and tiring. Working in agriculture is different from other occupations because certain tasks cannot wait to be completed. Asking and getting help from others is often limited; and changing careers is not possible nor, is it a realistic and practical solution.

There are many simple solutions that can be made and practical principles that can be adopted to help minimize the physical demands of the job. Implementing these practical solutions can help farmers, ranchers, and farmworker to successfully complete agricultural jobs in spite of their arthritis.

- **ADD A STEP** with non-slip material to farm machinery to help with getting on and off farm machinery safely.
- **SUSPENSION SEAT** could be installed on your tractors or a **SEAT CUSHION** with lumbar support and **ADJUSTABLE ARM RESTS** added.
- **ADDITIONAL MIRRORS** could be added to the inside and outside of the tractor cab. You can see what is happening behind you without twisting your back.
- **COMMUNICATION TOOLS**, such as a cellular phone or two-way radio, can help save unnecessary trips and can be used in the event of an emergency.

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- SPINNER KNOBS or ENLARGED HANDLES can be used to help with grasping or if you have a limited range of motion.
- PORTABLE STOOL and UTILITY VEHICLE will allow you to SIT DOWN as much as possible to lessen joint pain from prolonged standing and/or walking.
- KNEE PADS can be used when working on the ground.
- GLOVES can be worn to protect your hands.
- THICKER GRIPS can be used on tools and utensils to help with your grasp.
- CUSHIONED MATS can be placed around your work area to help reduce pain in your joints.
- AUTOMATIC or SELF ADJUSTING TOOLS, such as ratchets, power tools and air tools, can prevent repetitive motion.
- MANY LOW COST MODIFICATIONS can be used on your farm to prevent further injury.