



Making Farming Safer for Senior Producers

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In Canada, the face of farming is changing. More primary agricultural producers are women, and for the first time since 1991, the proportion of farmers under the age of 35 rose. However, the 2016 Agriculture Census also found that there were more farmers over age 70 than under 35. The reality of Canadian agriculture is that older farmers are farming more acres and often farming well into their 70s and 80s.

These older farmers are vital to Canadian agriculture. With years of successful farming under their belts, older farmers offer wisdom, knowledge, and experience. However, older farmers are also at risk for injury. Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting statistics show that farmers over the age of 60 have a higher than average fatality rate, in fact, farmers 80 years of age and older have the highest fatality rate of any other age group.

As we age, our bodies change. Our sense of smell, vision, hearing, and touch are likely to experience some decrease in sensitivity. Health concerns like arthritis, low back pain, and respiratory conditions can affect a person's ability to farm safely. Aging is not the only factor that can have an impact – other factors like disease, lifestyle and medication use can also influence a person's capability to farm safely.

However, these factors don't mean that a senior farmer is destined for a farm injury. Working smarter, not harder, is a key factor in keeping seniors safe. At any age, whether a young worker, an experienced producer or a senior farmer, working safely means identifying risks and potential hazards and developing a plan to lessen the risk of injury.

Before undertaking a task, use a critical eye and take a close a close look at the job. Break down the job into each of the tasks required and determine the potential hazards and risks associated with each of these tasks. Determine what it would take to eliminate or control the hazards and make the changes. It could be as simple as using Personal Protective Equipment or finding the proper tool for the job.



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Next, think about the minimum ability to safely perform the task, do you have the ability to do the task? Also, think about your risk factors. For example, if the task requires lifting, do you have the ability to lift the required weight without risking injury? (Remember, there are often considerable differences among individuals. Each individual should assess their capabilities based on their own circumstances.) Be realistic about your capabilities, working within your abilities will set you up for success. Trying to do more than you're able is setting yourself up for failure, or worse, injury.

Other factors to take into consideration include environmental conditions. A safe work situation can be hazardous depending on environmental factors. Factors like ice, noise, dust, and lighting can all impact the environment. Consider not just the environment, but also how it can affect your abilities to work safely.

Not all changes associated with aging will have a significant impact on a person's capacity to perform farming tasks. But it's important to assess what tasks become more challenging as we age. Planning work activities to compensate for any limitations will set a senior farmer up for continued success.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is a public awareness campaign focusing on the importance of farm safety. CASW takes place every year during the third week of March. In 2018, CASW takes place March 11 to 17. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca.



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