



## Ranching and Farming with Arthritis

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Arthritis and other similar conditions are the number one cause of disabilities in the United States. In 2002 approximately 43 million adults reporting that they were experiencing limitations in their normal work routine due to some form of arthritis.

Arthritis combined with the risky work tasks a rancher faces increases an individual's chances of secondary injuries. Pain associated with arthritis can also limit the rancher's ability to perform many of these tasks as well as prior to the onset of the disease. The following tips offer advice on coping with arthritis on the ranch. Many of these are low to no cost modifications and are easy to implement.

- ❖ Avoid long durations of gripping or grasping. Build up handles to reduce the amount of force needed to grip the object. For example, wrapping **duct tape** around the handle of a shovel many times increases the surface area of the handle and provides for easier gripping.
- ❖ Avoid jarring motions or shocks when operating or servicing equipment. Never jump from the cab of the equipment.
- ❖ Maintain proper **posture**.
- ❖ Move around; Take time for a break to **stretch** and **walk**.
- ❖ Use power equipment when possible to move and hoist heavy objects.
- ❖ When entering equipment climb one step at a time, leading with the weaker or more painful leg. Consider installing additional **grab bars** or **step extensions**.
- ❖ Wear good-quality shoes to support feet and ankles. Doing so will relieve pressure, absorb shock and reduce pain.
- ❖ Use assistive aids such as **handle extensions, canes and splints** to support weak fingers and prevent deformities.
- ❖ Use hot/cold treatments for pain.
- ❖ Practice simple range of motion, strengthening, fitness and/or endurance exercises to reduce chances of painful movements or potential deformities. Walking, biking and swimming are examples of these types of exercises.
- ❖ Conserve energy. Pace tasks and match them with times you are most able to complete them. For example, if you have the most energy in the mornings, consider doing the tasks which require more energy during the morning.

Ranchers and farmers with arthritis should take extra caution when working around livestock. Reduced mobility makes it more difficult to get away in an emergency situation. Added **gates** or **panels** can help

in limiting direct exposure to the animals. Dairy farmers may consider automatic milking units to decrease the amount of bending required.

**Automatic gate openers, cattle guards** and **automatic hitching systems** limit the amount of times an individual must climb in and out of equipment.

#### **For more information**

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