Safety Tips for Ranching and Farming with Limitations due to Aging

In the Ag. industry, an estimated 500,000 ranch and farm workers, or one quarter of all operators, are 65 years of age or older. Age therefore is an important factor when considering potential risk for injuries. Because no mandatory retirement age exists for older ranchers and farmers, many continue to perform tasks beyond their ability to safely accomplish their work.

The physical or sensory limitations that one may experience through aging vary with each individual person. An individual may attempt to perform a particular task that may exceed his or her abilities with the idea that "maybe I can get away with doing this task without anything happening". It is important to recognize one’s limitations and respect those limitations. The following is a list of safety tips shared by ranchers and farmers who are affected by physical limitations due to the aging process.*

**Decreased reaction time:**

With decreased reaction time, the primary concern is the ability to perform farm tasks around livestock, machinery, and other hazardous areas without getting hurt. Individuals need to recognize the exact nature of their limitations and adjust accordingly. Direct access to livestock can be dangerous due to their unpredictable nature. Accommodations to reduce potential injury include:

- installation of fence line feeders or automated feeding systems,
- appropriate livestock holding equipment,
- having another person perform the potentially dangerous tasks,
- If one cannot afford an automated feed system, use a feed cart to avoid carrying feed, which can create unsafe conditions by placing the body in an unstable stance and increasing fatigue.

**Limited mobility:**

With decreased muscle range of motion, and limited mobility, it may be difficult to walk for long distances or for extended periods of time, especially when maneuvering around rough terrain. There are a variety of mobility aids that could aid an individual:

- modified lawn mowers,
- golf carts,
- electric and heavy-duty wheelchairs,
- all-terrain vehicles, preferably with bench seats,
- shoe and boot cleats, and special cane tips for ice, snow, and loose gravel.

Foot guards and modifications to controls for all-terrain vehicles and lawn mowers
should be considered if an individual lacks sensation and/or control in their legs or feet.

**Decreased gripping ability:**
Ranchers and farmers who experience decreased gripping ability in their hands or upper extremities may find that one hand or arm is stronger than the other and will consistently rely on that one extremity. Consider:

- one-handed tools and other labor-saving devices to help prevent additional injuries to the stronger extremity,
- utilizing labor-saving devices such as automatic hitching devices and bin level indicators,
- job restructuring of those tasks that are too difficult or hazardous to perform.

**Arthritis and range of motion:**
Because of arthritis, decreased muscle range of motion, and limited mobility, it may be difficult to mount and dismount machinery due to the distance from the ground to the first step. Consider:

- Additional steps, wider steps,
- steps made of non-slip material such as, "diamond strut" or "grip strut",
- hand holds to make mounting and dismounting machinery safer and easier. For individuals who have experienced a knee or hip replacement, additional steps are recommended.

**Loss of physical strength:**
Through the aging process, one may lose physical strength. In older style tractors for example, it may take a great deal of strength to operate the brake and clutch. To accommodate:

- hand controls should be installed,
- Appropriate guidelines and standards should be used when designing and fabricating hand controls so they do not cause further injury,

Rollover protective devices (ROPS) are recommended on all equipment.

**For more information**
Wyoming AgrAbility
(866) 395-4986
(307) 766-3052
www.uwyo.edu/agrability
agrability@uwyo.edu

This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Agreement No: 2010-41590-20741

The University of Wyoming is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.

**Information compiled by Kansas AgrAbility and from the National Ag Safety Database**