“Visual impairment” is a commonly used term to refer to a condition in which an individual has some form of limitation due to an uncorrectable visual acuity. “Acuity” describes the amount of detail an individual sees compared to what a person with normal vision sees. The phrase “20/20” vision refers to how acuity is measured. The top number refers to the distance (feet) at which measurement was taken. The bottom number refers to the distance (feet) at which a “normal” eye can see a specific size image.

“Low vision” is used to describe visual acuity correctable to 20/50 or less, but the individual has some usable vision. Another term used for low vision may be “visually impaired”. “Blindness” in legal terms is the visual acuity of 20/200 in the best eye with the best possible correction. An individual can be legally blind while still having some functional vision.

Individuals with low vision or a visual impairment can still participate in farming and ranching activities. The following tips are offered to help make some tasks easier and safer for visually impaired producers. Many of the provided tips can be used for little to no cost.

**Wind chimes:** Wind chimes can provide a “landmark” for individuals with visual difficulties. Hung by the house they can symbolize the major point of return. You can also “tune” various outbuildings for recognition. Chimes can be made from copper or aluminum tubing suspended with fishing line. Different lengths and diameters make different sounds and depending on your ear for music, can be made to make very pleasant sounds.

**Tennis balls:** A tennis ball suspended on a string or piece of twin can provide a marker to tell you when to stop a vehicle or piece of equipment as you drive into a garage or other building. A playground ball may also be used. Doing this allows an individual to run into something on purpose (i.e. stop when the ball touches the windshield) to avoid running into something accidentally.

**Hanging feed sacks:** Feed sacks can be used in a similar fashion as the balls. Hang old feed sacks about two feet from overhead objects that can pose a safety issue (i.e. lowered beams, light fixtures, etc.). This allows an individual to run into the sack before running into the hazard. Burlap bags work great because it will more than likely “snag” the individuals clothing rather than slide off, producing a stronger warning. If heat from lights or other sources is a concern, use fiberglass screen door mesh.

**Measuring aids:** Different lengths of wood can be used as spacers for garden spacing or any other measurement you frequently make. Wood can be used to measure distances and depth.

**Workbench backboard:** A 4x8 inch piece of plywood (3/4” CD) mounted on the wall behind the work bench allows an individual to separate and organize tools to give each tool a permanent place for easy location. Heavier tools should be hung lower in case they fall.
Workbench to work relationship: Carrying tools farther causes it to be more difficult to maintain order. Some tasks do require an individual to work away from the normal workspace. Locating a workbench near a door is practical.

Landmarks: These are objects such as trees, rocks, fences and buildings that never move. Landmarks such as shrubs, flower beds and other ornamental fixtures can be added to assist in locating specific areas.

Old garden/air hose: A cracked garden hose can be used to fashion guards around obstacles and machinery. Split a piece of hose lengthwise to make a protective surface for the edges of barrels, tanks and buckets.

Tape and rubber bands: Duct tape is available in a variety of colors and can be used to code tools such as rakes, hoes and shovels. Loop and wrap rubber bands around small hand tools to distinguish between items such as Phillips head or flathead screwdrivers for easier identification. Rubber bands can also be used to hold groups of small tools (such as Allen wrenches) together.

Kitchen magnets: Use magnets to hold small parts in place while you do something else. They can also be used to mark tank levels.

Blocks and stops: Mark areas on your table saw or radial arm saw tables where you should never put your hands. Use pusher sticks or boards you have made out of scrap lumber. Marking these areas with tape or colors does not guarantee safety but helps remind the user of the necessary precautions that should be taken while using these tools.

Timers and creative wiring: For the safety of sighted people on the ranch, use timers on at least some of the lights in your buildings. With high-voltage and machinery controls, use a type of breaker and try to utilize the various switches as much alike as possible (i.e. mounting all switches so up is on, etc.)

Bungee cords and springs: Bungee cords can be used to hold doors open or closed. Springs can be used to make any hinged door or lid close to whatever position is desirable. Both springs and bungee cords can be used to hold things out of the way leaving both hands available to complete a task.

Nails: Partially driven nails present a convenient place to hang a hat or coat, but may be hazardous to sleeves, etc. For a protective cover by cutting a length of hose a little longer than the nail and slide it over the nail like a sleeve. The nail will hold a hat or coat, but won’t catch on other clothes or skin.

Written signs: Don’t hesitate to make and post signs indicating things you need done to assist in finding tools and completing your tasks easier.

Boardwalks: Level terrain on regular paths by making a board sidewalk out of scrap lumber. Pressure treated lumber works the best. Maintain the boards to insure safety.

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