

**Canadian
Agricultural
Safety Week
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FACT SHEET #1

THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

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Older farmers at greater risk

Studies by the Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program (CAISP) indicate that farmers and ranchers aged 60 years or older accounted for 35 per cent of all work-related farm fatalities and 24 per cent of hospitalized farm injuries. Yet people over 60 represent only 13 per cent of the farming population.

The study showed that as farmers age, their likelihood of being involved in an incident increased. For example, farming seniors between the 70 and 79 years of age make up only 3.2 per cent of the farm population, yet they account for 17.8 per cent of farm work-related deaths and 20 per cent of hospitalized injuries. The risks to seniors in agriculture are important because the CAISP study also shows that the proportion of Canadian producers aged 65 years or over will double from the current level of 13 per cent to 23 per cent of the population by 2041.

The harsh reality is that older farmers must realize, accept and deal with the effects of aging – just like everyone else. Some of the normal signs of ageing may include the quicker onset of fatigue, reduced vision, hearing, and balance, and slower reaction time. Also, many seniors suffer from disorders that reduce mobility, such as arthritis, which can seriously impact safe job performance. All these factors can increase risk among older agricultural workers. And finally, the older we get – the less we are able to withstand and recover from the usually severe injuries of farm-related incidents.

The machines types most commonly associated with injuries to older farm workers are tractors, augers, combines, motor vehicles, power take off devices, swathers, balers and ploughs.

Injuries to seniors often have serious consequences to seniors themselves. Many injuries take longer to recover from and can cause an irreversible decline in function, which in turn could lead to institutionalization and sometimes even death. The emotional costs are immeasurable.

Farmers or ranchers and their families need to ensure that the tasks done by elder workers are appropriate for the reduced physical abilities that come with increasing age. Here are some practical suggestions to reduce risks for aging farmers.

- Remember that vision is hampered the most at dawn and dusk - avoid driving tractors at these times. Have your vision checked by a doctor regularly – including peripheral vision, which may affect driving performance.

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Older farmers at greater risk.../2.

- Get plenty of rest during planting, harvest and long work periods. Take frequent breaks to protect against fatigue and physical stress. Drink plenty of liquids and keep them available in your work area. Accidents are more likely to occur after fatigue has set in.
- Have something to eat regularly, at least every four hours.
- Use extreme caution when operating equipment. Be familiar with any medication you take and its effect on your reaction time. Even over-the-counter medications can hamper reflexes and diminish alertness, limiting your ability to operate farm tractors and other machinery.
- Make sure that a family member or fellow worker knows where you will be working. Bring a cell phone or two-way radio if you can, so you can get help if you need it.
- Know your limitations. Don't push your mind and body past their safe and healthy limits.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture along with the Farm Credit Canada, the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada want to remind Canadian farmers that “*Farm Safety Means Farm Safely*” – know your limits and those of your aging co-workers.

- 30 -

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