



Aging and Agriculture

Farmworkers and farmers are working longer, often well beyond normal retirement age and into their 70's. According to the Census of Agriculture released by the USDA, 62% of farmers are over 55 with an average age of 57.5, which is roughly 17 years older than the average American worker. The average age of agricultural workers has also steadily increased over the decades, currently averaging 39 years. Like the rest of the aging population, older farmworkers and farmers must also face the challenges that come with aging. At advanced ages, some must scale back their work hours or entrust the next generation to do



Source: NPR

some of the more physically demanding tasks to remain active in farming operations.



Source: Pacific Standard

Years of hard labor in agriculture can increase injury and contribute to developing chronic illnesses such as arthritis, affecting strength and range of motion, hearing and vision loss, back pain, and breathing problems from exposure to dust and pesticides. Good health ensures independence and productivity on the farm and at home. It is important to understand some common health factors impacting older farm workers to make adjustments where needed to help improve and maintain health.

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Source: Rural Health Information

Tips for Preventing Injuries and Maintaining Health

Agriculture is more hazardous than most other industries, with older farmworkers and farmers experiencing high rates of injuries and chronic illnesses. Incorporating these simple measures can help older workers reduce risks of injury and maintain good health.

Preventing Injuries

- **Don't take your experience for granted.** Instead use it to anticipate risks for yourself.
- **Work with a partner when possible.** Keep others informed of your whereabouts and work plans.
- **When possible, avoid driving tractors at dawn and dusk.** Visibility is poorer during these times of day due to low light conditions which can make holes in the road less visible.
- **To prevent slips and falls in the workplace:**
 - ✓ Put anti-slip reflective tape or anti-slip treads on machinery ladders, steps, ramps, and or other potentially slick walkways and work surfaces.
 - ✓ Wear non-slip footwear.
 - ✓ Mark locations where floor level transitions occur (e.g., steps down, steps up, or uneven surfaces) with reflective or high contrast tape.
- **Maintain 3 points of contact (2 hands and 1 foot, or 2 feet and 1 hand) at all times,** when climbing onto and off of tractors and machinery, or when climbing ladders or steps.



Maintaining Health

- **Know your physical limits, we all have them!** Use mechanical equipment such as loaders, carts, dollies, or hoists to move heavy loads, and get a partner to assist when needed. If possible, carry a phone with you and check in with a family member at least once a day at a specific time to let them know how you're doing and feeling.
- **Remember to rest and take breaks.** During peak work seasons that require long hours remember to stop and rest when needed. Try alternating tasks to give your body breaks from working with the same groups of muscles.
- **Wear a broad-brimmed hat.** This is recommended to reduce sun exposure, a leading cause of skin cancer for agricultural workers.
- **See your physician regularly.** Talk to them about your work and any prescriptions you might be taking. Be sure to inform your physician of any health problems that may be affecting your work. Try to avoid missing appointments even when farming is in peak season.
- **Make healthier lifestyle choices.** Practicing a healthy lifestyle includes healthy eating, regularly exercising and avoiding tobacco use (smoking).
- **Understand your mental health.** Older farmworkers and farmers may experience feelings of loneliness or isolation as their children grow and move away from traditional farm settings. Poor mental health in older adults may impair functioning and pose safety challenges in daily life and on the farm. Talk to your doctor or counselor when you are feeling down.



Source: The Wall Street Journal

Tips for Navigating Healthcare Services for Older Farmworkers and Farmers

Tip 1: Locate your local community health center. Community health centers are community-based and patient-centered organizations that serve those with limited access to health care. These clinics provide quality care despite one's ability to pay, offering sliding fee scales and services specifically for those without insurance.

Tip 2: Check your Medicare and Medicaid eligibility. Understanding Medicare and Medicaid can be confusing. Below is some basic information to help you understand the difference between the two.

- **Medicare** is a federal insurance program that serves people over 65, whatever their income. Patients pay part of costs through deductibles for hospital and other costs. It is run by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, an agency of the federal government.
- **Medicaid** provides health insurance coverage for people with low incomes. It covers a variety of health services and limits out-of-pocket costs. In some cases, people can qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid. If you have a lower income, you may be eligible for Medicaid in your state. Medicaid is known as Medi-Cal (Medical) in California.



Source: Cardinal Guide

For information on eligibility and coverage contact your county's Health and Human Services Department.

Tip 3: Ask about generic medications. Brand-name medications can be very costly. Ask your physician for generic alternatives which are lower-cost.

Tip 4: Obtain a Referral to MCN Health Network. If you are an older farmworker who travels from one agricultural site to another, ask your physician to refer you to the Migrant Clinician Network (MCN) Health Network. MCN provides the following services:

- Patient assistance in learning the health care system.
- Medical records transfer.
- Identification and evaluation of health care and social services.
- Education for patients who move while they are undergoing treatment, follow-up screenings, or other health services.



Source: MCN Health Network

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