

Arthritis and the Farmer/Rancher



Photo courtesy of Al Schreitmueller

Thought not often in the top ten “Surveys Says!” answers for the question “name a disability”, 1 in 3 Americans will be affected by arthritis and for farmers and ranchers, this can be a real world disability.

Arthritis means “joint inflammation”, which can result in pain and loss of motion. Farmers and Ranchers are at an increased risk for this condition. Proper medical care and modifying work methods or supplementing them with different methods or tools early can prevent long-term damage which can become permanent.

Osteoarthritis causes the deterioration of smooth joint tissue called cartilage. Bone ends may rub against each other and thicken resulting in “spurs”. This causes more pain and deformity which can “snow-ball”. It occurs mostly in weight bearing joints. Hips/legs affect mobility, and upper extremity involvement can affect the ability to do the work.

There are many ways to manage the risks. One is to manage one’s weight. For example, due to the physics of joints and stress, an extra pound of body weight converts to 4lbs of knee stress and 6lbs of hip stress. As you compensate for pain on one side, you may adapt your body in asymmetric ways and effect the back and spine.

A variety of treatments may be prescribed including heat/cold treatments, specific exercises - like you need more... and there are targeted medications that may help.

There are also a variety of ways to modify how farm and ranch work are completed to minimize joint stress. The Arthritis Foundation in cooperation with AgrAbility (“Cultivating Accessible Agriculture”) has a booklet and web-site with very specific tips on how to minimize joint stresses at www.arthritis-ag.org

Perdue University also has a wide variety of materials at their “Breaking New Ground Resources Center” which are designed to help farmers and ranchers continue to be productive despite disabilities. For more info call 800-825-4264 or check them out at www.breakingnewground.info .

The Arthritis Foundation has substantial materials available and can be found at www.arthritis.org .

AgrAbility information can be found at www.agrability.org .