

Make Farming with Arthritis Easier

Modifying tasks and equipment can help prevent further damage.

by **Kerri Ebert**, *K-State Research & Extension News*

Arthritis, one of the most common chronic disease conditions in the United States, has a profound impact on farmers by reducing mobility, physical strength and the ability to complete routine tasks. Farming with arthritis means daily changes in joint pain and mobility, which can affect completion of even the most basic farm chores.

During Kansas Farm Safety and Health Week, Sept. 15-21, Kerri Ebert, coordinator of the Kansas AgrAbility Project, reminded farmers to focus on their health and safety.

Arthritis diagnosis, treatment and care should be directed by health care professionals, Ebert said, but simplifying chores and using assistive solutions can help reduce joint stress. Kansas AgrAbility helps farmers identify and prioritize chore and equipment modifications to safely accommodate arthritis.

Modifying tasks and equipment won't reverse joint damage, but they can help prevent further damage. To accommodate arthritis-related limitations

on the farm, Kansas AgrAbility encourages farmers to consider assistive technology solutions.

- ▶ Use wheels to move feed, tools or other equipment to eliminate heavy lifting and carrying. Wheeled assistive devices range from a simple wheelbarrow to a motorized utility vehicle or golf cart, depending on needs and budget.
- ▶ Use extended handles on tools to help conserve energy. Less force will be needed to manipulate objects.
- ▶ Choose ergonomically designed, lightweight tools to reduce joint stress, pain and fatigue.
- ▶ Use spring-loaded, self-adjusting, or ratcheting tools to reduce pressure on joints while increasing leverage and force with minimal pressure.
- ▶ Add mirrors to the inside and outside of tractor cabs to reduce the need to twist to see out the back window.
- ▶ Install spinner knobs and handles to help with limited grasp and range of motion

on the steering wheel. Thicker grips on hand tools also help with grip.

- ▶ Place cushioned mats on the floor in workshop areas to help reduce joint and back pain.

Many farm-related tasks can be modified slightly so a farmer with arthritis can perform them more easily, Ebert said. It is important to develop an effective treatment plan with a medical professional, follow the plan and respect your body's limits.

For more information about farming with arthritis, visit the Arthritis & Agriculture website (www.arthritis-ag.org/) or call 1-800-783-2342. For more information about farming with any disability visit the Kansas AgrAbility website or call 1-800-526-3648 or 1-800-825-4264 and ask for a Kansas AgrAbility Assistive Technology Ag Specialist. Kansas AgrAbility, based at Kansas State University (K-State), is part of the K-State Research and Extension network of programs.

