

Reduce the Risk of Noise-induced Hearing Loss

Young farmers are at high risk of noise-induced hearing loss – yet are often unaware of it until the damage has already been done.

Research shows that farmers, mechanics and carpenters have significantly higher rates of hearing loss than the general population. One study in Wisconsin found that approximately one-quarter of the male farmers surveyed experienced hearing-related communication difficulties by the age of 30. And a University of Iowa study found that hearing loss puts farmers at increased risk of being injured on the job.

Despite these facts, many young farmers believe that hearing loss will not affect them until they are much older. Or, they think that a hearing aid will undo any damage that has been done. Unfortunately, this is not true. A good hearing aid can help amplify sounds, but will not fully restore lost hearing.

Here are some tips on how young farmers can reduce their risk of noise-induced hearing loss:

- **Understand how noise-induced hearing loss can occur.** Prolonged and frequent exposure to noise levels above 85 decibels, both on and off the farm, can result in permanent hearing loss. If you need to raise your voice to be heard an arm's length away, the noise is probably loud enough to damage your hearing. Squealing pigs, tractors, combines, grain dryers, chain saws and other farm equipment often produce noise levels above 85 decibels.
- **Know the early signs of noise-induced hearing loss.** One early sign is “tinnitus,” which is a ringing, hissing, roaring, whistling, chirping or clicking sound in the ears.
- **Limit your exposure to loud noises as much as possible.** When operating tractors or other farm equipment, keep cab doors and windows shut.
- **Use hearing protection.** Hearing protectors such as earplugs and protective earmuffs come in hundreds of different styles. Use hearing protection at all times you are near loud noise. Keep it in a convenient location, such as in your pockets or on the steering wheel of your tractor.

Many free resources are available to help young farmers reduce the risk of noise-induced hearing loss. These include two new National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Centers for Disease Prevention brochures. Additional copies of *They're Your Ears: Protect Them – Hearing Loss Caused by Farm Noise is Preventable* and *Have You Heard? Hearing Loss Caused by Farm Noise is Preventable: Young Farmers' Guide for Selecting and Using Hearing Protection* can be downloaded from this Web page:

www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/pubs/no_pubs.html. Additional printed copies or bulk copies are also available by E-mailing farm.noise@cdc.gov.

Among the many other good online resources are Dangerous Decibels, www.dangerousdecibels.org and the NIOSH Noise and Hearing Loss Prevention Web page, www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise.