

**NewsWatch**

# Staying active with arthritis

By **CURT ARENS**

**A**RTHRITIS affects more than one third of all adult farmers. With arthritis coming in more than 100 different forms and the average age of farmers increasing, more farmers are suffering from this affliction according to Amber Wolfe, National AgrAbility project coordinator at the Arthritis Foundation.

Arthritis makes farm tasks extremely painful and difficult. The inflammation of joints and the pain make the disease one of the leading causes of disability in clients of the USDA/NIFA AgrAbility program. Arthritis impairs a farmer's mobility, dexterity and capacity to lift a load and causes emotional difficulty associated with the pain.

"I grew up on the farm," said Wolfe, who was on hand at the Nebraska AgrAbility exhibit at Husker Harvest Days this year. "Growing up in the industry, I realize that it is painful when a farmer can't do what they love to do."

Wolfe said that farmers diagnosed with arthritis can still perform regular farm tasks, but they need to plan ahead and modify how they do their work.

**How to control the pain**

Wolfe emphasized, "There are so many simple things we can do" to make farming with arthritis easier.

Here are a few suggestions to ease the pain:

- **Simplify jobs.** Use the tools available to make jobs easier. Instead of hauling feed by hand in buckets or bushel baskets, use a skid loader or all-terrain vehicle to do the job.

- **Pace yourself.** Allow more time for tasks. You should plan ahead so you aren't rushed with jobs at the last minute. Wolfe said that small changes to the regular farm routine can make a big difference. Don't jump from a tractor cab, wagon or grain bin to the ground. Use the ladder to step down slowly, saving joints from unnecessary stress.

- **Use the largest possible joint in your body to do the job.** Make sure that the weight is being carried by joints that can handle the load.

- **Wear non-slip footwear.** Wolfe said wearing the proper shoes or boots and understanding the type of surface you're treading on will help prevent slips and falls.

- **Use appropriate assistive aids.** There are ways to modify tools and equipment inexpensively to help do the job and cause less pain from arthritis. Taping foam around tool handles, for instance, makes them easier to grip.

- **Maintain proper posture.** If you're sitting on a tractor seat for several hours, proper posture and paying attention to position in the seat might prevent pain later on.

- **Avoid gripping and grasping for long periods of time.** Changing the grasp on a steering wheel or a tool, or resting hands for a period, will prevent fatigue.

- **Seek out assistance.** Learn more about organizations like AgrAbility that can help farmers cope with arthritis emotionally and on the job. There are several resources in print and online.

For more information, contact Wolfe

**At a glance**

- Over one third of all farmers suffer from arthritis.
- Arthritis pain makes routine farm tasks extremely difficult.
- Nebraska AgrAbility offers resources to assist farmers in coping with arthritis.

at [awolfe@arthritis.org](mailto:awolfe@arthritis.org), or contact the Nebraska AgrAbility office, 2727 West 2nd St., Suite 471, Hastings, NE 68901-4608 or call 800-471-6425.

**EASING THE PAIN:** Amber Wolfe tells Nebraska Farmer field editor Curt Arens about several simple steps that can help farmers cope with arthritis.



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