

## Safety Tips for Farming with a Back Injury or Back Problem<sup>1</sup>

The physical limitations that persons with a back injury might experience vary with the level and severity of the injury. These individuals often experience limitations in one or more of the following activities: standing, sitting, reaching, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, climbing, bending, stooping, crawling, kneeling, crouching, running, driving, walking, and jumping. Individuals with back injuries should identify the specific functional limitations that are associated with their specific back injury. Based on these limitations, one can then determine the types of tasks around the farm that may be hazardous to perform or that could result in further injury or deterioration of current abilities.

Farming safely with a back injury may be more difficult since it is a disability that is not clearly visible and there is not a complete loss of a particular body function. The following is a list of safety tips that have been shared by various farmers who have experienced back injuries:

1. **Obtain appropriate assistive technologies** or labor-saving devices to assist in performing tasks that exceed your physical abilities.
2. **Add additional steps made out of non-slip material to farm machinery** to assist in mounting and dismounting safely.
3. An **independent suspension seat** can be installed in some tractors to help absorb shock and vibration. The type of suspension systems may include pneumatic (air), hydraulic (oil), mechanical, or a combination of any of these suspension systems.

Tractor seat cushions themselves can be modified or replaced to accommodate back injury. Seat cushions that are installed in newer tractors are considered to be ergonomically designed and better for back support. These seats often have adjustable lumbar support, arm rests, and thigh support to help distribute the weight across the seat. They provide support to reduce stress or pressure to the lower back area. These cushions can also be purchased and installed in many older model tractors with some adaptations required.

In some tractors, a swivel seat pan can be added to assist the operator in rotating to see behind the tractor. Therefore, it is important that the seat cushions do not restrict movement when sliding the legs and turning to see behind the tractor. To eliminate the need for frequent upper body turning, additional mirrors can be added inside and outside of the tractor cab to see what is happening behind the tractor.

Tractor seating modifications made to accommodate a low back injury may still not be sufficient. It is often recommended that someone with a back injury take a break at least every two hours to get out of the tractor, to stretch, and to increase circulation to the lower back. Consult with your physician regarding how often breaks should be taken.

4. **Various outdoor mobility aids** can be used to decrease fatigue and further deterioration of back injuries. These mobility aids include **riding lawn mowers, golf carts, and all-terrain vehicles**. It is important to note that, while the device may reduce fatigue, it may cause additional problems because of lack of suspension while riding around bumpy or rough terrain.

5. **Automatic hitching devices and automatic gate openers** can reduce the frequency of mounting and dismounting from a tractor.
6. **Direct access to livestock should be avoided** due to their unpredictable behavior. Job restructuring or modifications to livestock handling facilities should be explored. These modifications might include: fence line feeding, raised decks for hog facilities, or automated feed systems. Feed carts and an auger wagon are often used in feeding livestock located in outside facilities.
7. **A combination sit/stand stool** can be used when performing tasks that require standing for long periods of time. This stool can be placed in the farrowing house to be used when attending to health-care needs of pigs, or placed in the farm shop next to the workbench to help relieve stress in the lower back area.
8. **There are several back-support devices** available through durable medical equipment dealers and physicians. Consult with a doctor about whether or not a back-support device is recommended. Anyone with a back problem should remember to use proper lifting and body mechanics,



in addition to maintaining any physician-recommended exercise program.

9. **Any adaptations or modifications intended for use by an individual with a disability should be used by that individual only.** Use of a modification or adaptation by another individual could result in an injury.

## Contact

Kansas AgrAbility customers or potential customers can call 1-800-KAN DO IT (1-800-526-3648). The KAN DO IT line will connect the client with the nearest Assistive Technology Access Site. The client's information will be referred to one of three Agriculture Assistive Technology Specialists who will make direct contact with the customer.

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Website: [agrability.ksu.edu](http://agrability.ksu.edu) | Email: [agrability@ksu.edu](mailto:agrability@ksu.edu) | Telephone: 1-800-KAN-DO-IT

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