

## Safety Tips for Farming with Arthritis

For a farmer with arthritis, even the simplest tasks can be painful, difficult, and sometimes impossible. The nature of the disease means daily variations in joint pain and mobility, which translates into not knowing from one day to the next what chores will be the most difficult. In general, farmers with arthritis should accommodate their limitations by taking frequent breaks and conserving as much energy as possible by using labor saving devices to help with farm tasks. Assistive technology solutions can make farm/ranch work possible for people with arthritis.

This tip sheet presents suggestions for low-cost devices and modifications to help farmers accommodate limitations caused by arthritis. This information is not intended to replace the advice and guidance of a physician. With proper medical care, arthritis can be managed so its progress is slowed and its effects are minimized. Talking with a doctor to develop an individual treatment plan is recommended. Consider the following suggestions to reduce joint stress, pain, and fatigue.

1. **Add a step covered with non-slip material** to farm machinery to help with getting on and off farm equipment.
2. **Install a suspension seat** on a tractor or combine. Seat cushions with lumbar support and adjustable arm rests provide good support.
3. **Add oversized mirrors or a swivel seat** to help see what is happening behind equipment without twisting to look over shoulders.
4. **Carry a cell phone or two-way radio** to save unnecessary trips. It can also be used in an event of an emergency.

5. **Use proper-sized tools** to fit hand size. These are easier to hold and require less hand strength. Smaller handled tools increase the likelihood of keeping a straight wrist — a more natural position. Cushioned grips on handles and tools can help with grasping tools.
6. **Automatic or self-adjusting tools** such as ratchets, power tools, and air tools can prevent the stress of repetitive motion.
7. **Wear gloves** to protect hands and to reduce stress when gripping, lifting, and carrying. Impact resistant gloves help absorb vibrations when driving machinery.



8. **Use a portable sit/stand stool** in the workshop or when monitoring livestock to allow an opportunity to sit down as much as possible and lessen joint pain from prolonged standing. A utility vehicle can reduce walking and helps save strength for other tasks.
9. **Cushioned mats** can be placed around work areas to help reduce joint pain. Similarly, knee pads can ease joint pain when working on the ground.

10. Talk to a doctor about **prescription drugs**. Some increase sensitivity to working in heat. Work in the cooler parts of the day when possible and stay hydrated.
11. **Stretch legs, back, and shoulders before working** because stretching lubricates the joints. Schedule a break to prevent injury and alternate tasks as much as possible to be able to work safer and longer.

There are many low-cost modifications for use on the farm and to help with everyday arthritis pain and prevent further injury. Adding **oversized mirrors**, using **proper sized tools**, wearing **impact resistant gloves**, and **stretching legs and shoulders** before work are just a few ways to conserve energy while reducing joint stress, pain, and fatigue during your work day.



## 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.

---

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

*Supported under Special Project Number 2018-41590-28719 through USDA-NIFA.*

*Kansas State University Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering:*

*John Slocombe, Ph.D., Professor, Project Director,*

*Tawnie Larson, Project Coordinator,*

*Shari Coatney, President/CEO, of Southeast Kansas Independent Living Resource Center, Co-project Director,*

*University of Kansas Life Span Institute:*

*Sheila Simmons, MS, Research Project Manager,*

*Sara Sack, Ph.D., Senior Scientist.*

Publications from Kansas State University are available at:  
[www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu](http://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu)

Date shown is that of publication or last revision. Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced. In all instances, credit Tawnie Larson et. al., *Safety Tips for Farming with Arthritis*, Kansas State University, September 2019.

## Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, J. Ernest Minton, Director.