

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Women Working in Agriculture



Across the centuries, women have worked in agriculture providing food for their families and communities. The number of women working as principle farmer has tripled over the past thirty years and their work tasks have also changed. Women contribute to our strong farm economy and will continue to live, work and raise families on farms.

This fact sheet is designed to highlight the unique risk factors for women working in agriculture. Practical solutions are offered to assist farm women in maintaining a healthy and productive farming future.

GENDER DIFFERENCES AND WORK-RELATED INJURY RISK

Gender Differences	Description	Exposures/Risks	Possible Health and Safety Issues for Women
Size and Shape	On average, women are shorter than men with different body proportions (ie: wider hips, shorter arms and legs)	Use of equipment or tools not designed for women	-Increased risk for disorders of the knee and hip -Carpal tunnel in the wrists
		Personal protective equipment (PPE) that doesn't fit well	-Exposure to respiratory, chemical, or other hazards
		Caring for animals	-Increased risk for injury <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal bites, kicks • Pinned by animal against railing, wall
Strength	Upper body strength is 40- 75% less and lower body strength is 5-30% less than for males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of equipment or tools not designed for women • Moving heavy objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk for lower back disorders • Potential injury to wrists and hands
		Caring for animals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggression from female animals protecting their young 	-Increased risk for injury <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal bites, kicks • Pinned by animal against railing, wall
Reproductive Factors	Pregnancy and fertility often not recognized or considered when women assume farm tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pesticides • Needle sticks • Livestock Hormones 	-Potential for fertility complications -Potential impact on the fetus
		Caring for animals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracting zoonotic diseases • Potential impact on fetus
Stress Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work on the farm and off creating competing demands - Responsible for management of household - Handling caring for children and aging parents/ grandparents 	Lack of sleep Lack of support	-Increased risk for injury -Anxiety, depression, alcohol or drug use, diminished coping skills, other behavioral health issues -Increase risk of illness due to lower immune system function

NOTES FOR TALKING TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

- Discuss your farm-related risks
- Ask questions relative to pesticide exposure and appropriate PPE
- Review sleep/rest patterns
- Discuss stress issues
- Seek routine screenings for early signs of heart disease, breast, uterine, and ovarian cancer and diabetes



IDENTIFY PREVENTION STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE OR REDUCE AG RELATED RISKS

GENDER DIFFERENCES	PREVENTION STRATEGIES
Size and Shape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When possible work with tools and equipment designed for smaller body frames • Be aware of surroundings and risks when working with animals • Seek PPE designed to fit your size and shape
Strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear sturdy foot attire to avoid slips, trips and falls • Avoid repetitive motion work or modify work to reduce strain on joints • Maintain strong bone density by appropriate calcium intake and exercise
Reproductive Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and understand information in precautionary statement on pesticides labels • Wear appropriate personal protective equipment based on the product label or when working around animals • Reduce exposures with proper laundering of personal or family members clothing
Stress Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish support systems which may include family, friends, online blogs • Seek assistance from health care professional for symptoms that may indicate depression and/or anxiety
GENERAL RISKS	PREVENTION STRATEGIES
Exposure to heat and sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear sun safe hats and clothing • Use sunscreen with SPF of 30 or higher at all times in all seasons
Longer hair styles and ponytails <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be caught in equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure longer hair above neckline in hat or band to prevent entanglement
Respiratory exposure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic dust • Pesticides • Disinfecting agents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear NIOSH approved 2 strap or cartridge respirator in appropriate size to fit your facial structure
Chronic noise exposure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loud equipment • Animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear NIOSH approved hearing protection • Choose hearing protection type and contour to fit your ear canal



This material was produced under a grant (SH26280-SH4) from the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. It does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organization imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

