



Safety Tips for Farming with a Brain Injury¹

In farming, the primary safety concerns with a brain injury are being able to perform farming tasks around machinery, livestock, and other hazardous areas, without getting hurt. A person who has experienced a brain injury as a result of a stroke or a blow to the head may have varying limitations including: memory loss, dizziness, fatigue, instability, paralysis, decreased reaction time, incoordination, cognitive impairment, grasping, visual and many other physical impairments.

In addition, the individual may experience impulsivity, and lack of awareness of current abilities. The individual may remember the abilities s/he had prior to the brain injury and may perceive themselves as having those same abilities. It is very important to determine the exact nature of the limitations and how these limitations may affect performing farm tasks safely.

The following is a list of general tips that farmers with brain injuries have shared to help prevent additional injuries.

1. If the doctor says that you shouldn't drive a car, then you shouldn't operate farm machinery.
2. If the doctor says that you can operate an automobile with modifications, then you can also operate farm machinery with appropriate modifications. Please consult with a rehabilitation professional regarding the appropriate modifications.
3. Head protection, such as helmets, should be worn at all times when performing farm related tasks.
4. If the injury has resulted in limited mobility, appropriate mobility aids should be selected to prevent falls. These aids may include: a golf cart; lawn mower with adaptations; an appropriate wheelchair; and special cane tips for maneuvering around ice, snow, and loose gravel.

1. The information shared is based on data gathered by the Easter Seal Society of Iowa's Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program through financial support from the Injury Prevention Research Center at the University of Iowa Grant #R49\CCR703640-02 funded by the Center for Disease Control. No scientific research has been conducted to determine if the above tips or suggestions are safe or effective. The information shared is simply ideas shared by farmers affected by disabilities of the staff at the FaRM Program. For more information or clarification contact the FaRM Program at (515) 289-1933 or submit comments or questions to P. O. Box 4002, Des Moines, Iowa, 50333.

5. Mounting and dismounting from farm machinery can be hazardous for someone with paralysis on one side of the body. Additional steps, wider steps, steps made of non-slip material such as “Grip Strut”, and additional hand-holds should be considered to prevent falling.

6. For tasks requiring vertical climbing, a lift, back support rings, or stairs could be considered, or have somebody else do the climbing. If there is a chance that you could become dizzy, then vertical climbing should be avoided completely. Always consult with a physician first, regardless of what modifications could be made.

7. Direct access to livestock can be dangerous due to their unpredictable nature. Accommodations to reduce potential injury include: installation of fence line feeders or automated feeding systems; installation of raised decks for hogs; appropriate livestock holding equipment; or having another person perform the potentially dangerous tasks.

8. For limitations due to decreased cognitive ability, consult with medical professionals as to what tasks could be safely performed with supervision and/or prompting aids including: a job coach; color coded measuring devices; memory aids; auditory aids, closed loop tape machine with repeating messages and outdoor communication devices.

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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on general farm safety, contact: Kansas State University Research and Extension Agricultural Safety and Health Program at 785-532-5813. To contact Kansas AgrAbility call 1-800-526-3648 (1-800-KAN DO IT)