

# Hearing Loss

## WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY?

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Many of us suffer a bit or a lot of hearing loss. This comes with age for sure and is often a result of long-term exposures to moderate levels of noise. It is certainly annoying, both to the one who has the loss and the ones who work and/or live around them. I know that as do many of you. The grandkids who have to repeat things, the movie that you need just enough louder to annoy others watching, you know the drill.

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What's that you say?

I yelled hello, there was no reply  
He paid no mind, I wondered why?

I tried again, a cheery salute  
He just didn't seem to give a hoot,

I moved to where he could see me plain  
And hollered out yet once again

This time a smile lit cross his face  
Said he was happy I'd come to his place

He liked things safe and clean and neat  
This ranch of his was a real treat

Not a guard was missing anywhere  
He worked his cattle with great care

His safety program was up to date  
Full discount on his WorkSafe rate

His workers all competent and trained....  
But staring at me now he leaned and he strained.

For his hearing was gone, long lost on the farm  
Machines and their noise had done him great harm.

Hearing loss is sneaky it comes on real slow  
But with proper protection it won't have to go.

Sadly, yes, you probably do know the drill. Hearing loss is attended to in many different ways: some get devices to help, others ignore the issue or pretend they don't have one, and yet others of us are just in that in-between stage where we don't need help yet but the edge is definitely gone. I know that on the outfit I ride for, the cowboss has learned he has to yell a bit louder and make sure I am looking his way before he calls out some instruction. He has also demonstrated great patience when I lean in from across the bawling herd and yell "pardon".

Noise is a serious and widespread problem in many agricultural workplaces. The formula that calculates exposure and acceptable noise levels is, in its simplest form, volume over duration. A very loud sound, like a shotgun blast, can cause damage instantly, whereas a much reduced decibel level can cause damage when sustained over an extended period of time. Noise from machinery, animals, (weaning?), tools and equipment can cause permanent hearing loss. You do need to consider the level of noise that you will be exposing yourself, your family members or workers to. Some tasks that may seem relatively quiet, perhaps by comparison to others, have greater potential to cause hearing loss than one might think. A task like harrowing might not seem like a job where hearing protection is required, but the high pitched clinking of metal striking upon metal or rocks, combined with the tractor volume, can certainly be damaging. Consider the job and evaluate the risk. This basic "risk assessment" mentality must be an ongoing part of your safety thinking. The best method of dealing with noise on the ranch or farm is to try and reduce the noise level at source. You might wonder: Is that possible? How do I do that? Perhaps one way is, when and where possible, choose quieter equipment. If you are

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repairing or retrofitting consider the installation of mufflers, silencers or the like that can reduce the noise levels. If you have lost mufflers, or similar, replace them as soon as possible.

Another means is to reduce the length of exposure to the noise. Reducing the length of time exposed to, or in the immediate vicinity of the noise source, can also help. While noise elimination is the best possible solution, sometimes the more realistic and practical manner to address this in many ranching environment, is with the use of hearing protection devices. These devices reduce the amount of noise reaching the ear. The two main types of protectors are earplugs and earmuffs, and there are many designs within these two types. Whichever type you prefer, choose the one that works for you and is adequate for the noise level you are working with and use it! Muffs hanging on the tractor, forgotten in the shop or plugs in your pocket can't do their job.

Most of the cell phones today can download a free app for noise level monitoring. While these are not 100% accurate, and are not a substitute when a noise exposure plan is required by regulation, they are pretty dam good and can give a quick indication of the noise level you are subjecting yourself or your workers to. At times, given the current great comfort and sound barrier abilities of cabbed tractors today, the interior volumes are greatly reduced. A caution here though: I have tested those units with the stereo playing at the level normally used and found that exposure to the stereo was louder than the tractor!

Bottom line: you are where you are and you have what hearing you have. It is not too late for most of us. Whatever level you have can actually, if we do nothing, be less. Kind of a one-way street this hearing thing. Take care of what you have, whether you have a little left or a lot, keep what you've got. It won't come back, assess and protect it, get the plugs out of your pocket and the muffs off the hook and use them.

For more information on hearing protection, preventing hearing loss or including a hearing conservation program in your safety program contact myself, your regional consultant or the Head Office of AgSafe at 1-877-533-1789

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