

# Tips for Aging Farmers in Maine

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**A**s people age, our bodies and the way we think change. Over the years, you have likely noticed changes in your abilities such as strength, endurance, eyesight, hearing, and even thinking or memory. This list of tips was developed to help older farmers and farm workers remain active and productive on the farm with safety and security in mind. Farm family members can also use this list to help support and encourage aging parents, spouses or employees.

## Physical

- Know your physical limits and abide by them. Don't push yourself. Realize your limits for a specific task or for a day's work. Pace yourself.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help from others in accomplishing tasks. Having someone with you on the job is an effective way to teach others what you know.
- Let others know where you will be and what you will be doing (on and off the farm).
- Carry a cell phone with you in case you need to call for help. If you don't carry a cell phone, develop a signaling system to alert others when you need help or may be in trouble.
- Consider having a service dog to accompany you or assist with some tasks. Trained service dogs can be a great help and companion animal.
- Wear the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) for those tasks that call for specific PPE.
- Dress in suitable clothing and footwear for different weather and work conditions.
- Use treaded footwear or grippers on your boots in slippery conditions.
- Make steps and walkways slip resistant. Install handrails along steps, stairs, and walkways when possible.
- Don't start or attempt tasks that you don't think you will be able to complete safely.
- Utilize simple machines such as levers, pulleys, inclined planes, wheels and axles in completing applicable tasks.
- Consider using powered equipment such as an electric wheelbarrow or an electrically powered wagon/cart to move loads instead of using brute strength.
- Consider using electric or hydraulic lift tables or scissor lifts in your farm shop or workspace as workbenches to get your work to the appropriate height.
- Consider using automation for different aspects of the farm such as barn door openers, gate openers, livestock watering, hose reels, vents, etc.

- Refrain from using ladders for specific tasks, as balance may be an issue for you. Ask someone else with better balance to do these tasks.
- Refrain from lifting heavy objects. Know your lifting limits.
- If you don't feel comfortable at any point in performing a task, stop (if it's safe to do so).
- Take breaks to rest and regain strength. Plan resting stations about the farm with seats or benches.
- Consider asking an occupational therapist (OT) to evaluate your limitations/abilities. They can provide ideas to help you remain active on the farm. Maine AgrAbility has OT's on staff who can interact with you without a fee.
- Eat nutritious meals (breakfast, lunch, and supper) daily.
  - If you become hungry between meals, consider carrying snacks such as fruit (apple, banana, or dried fruit) and protein like nuts or seeds (almonds, peanuts, sunflower or pumpkin seeds). Try making a trail mix with dried fruit, nuts and whole grain cereal and package in small containers so it is easy to grab at the beginning of the day.
  - Seeds and nuts have healthy fats and are higher in calories than fruits and vegetables so limit the amount you eat.
- Refrain from consuming too much caffeine, sugar, and salt. Try using spices to flavor food and avoid drinks with added sugar.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Place bottled water for convenient use in the barn, truck, shop, farm store, or office when you need it.
- Stretch your arms, legs, neck, and back (limber up) before beginning physical tasks.
- Consider identifying at least one other person as your relief worker for those times when you might not feel well, need time away from work, or have a doctor appointment. This is especially applicable for scheduled difficult tasks.
- If you work in the dark or in areas that are not well lit, consider installing motion lights, switch lights, or windows. Consider wearing a headlamp for early morning or evening chores. Make sure that all typical pathways through the barn or on the farm are clear and easy to maneuver.
- Consider using a magnifying glass for specific tasks when you might have difficulty seeing or reading. Some magnifying lenses are designed to clip onto cap visors or as headwear. Some lenses are equipped with LED lights to assist with viewing.
- The length of your workday should decrease as you age.
- If arthritis or joint pain is an issue for you, get a doctor's advice about proper ways to minimize the pain. Don't let yourself become dependent on pain relievers.
- Because turning to see behind you may be difficult when operating a tractor, consider installing a backup camera.
- Because connecting and disconnecting implements to farm tractors may be difficult, consider converting equipment to quick hitch systems.
- Realize that your physical reaction time may be diminishing. Don't put yourself in precarious or dangerous positions.

## Psychological

- If memory is a problem, consider developing checklists to remind yourself of steps for specific tasks. Post these checklists for easy access or keep them in a notebook.
- Post notes or signage to remind you of specific tasks or points to remember. If you spend a lot of time in your farm truck, using a dry erase marker on your truck side window might be a good way to keep track of your daily tasks.

- Learn the signs or symptoms of an oncoming stroke.
- Consider connecting with a counselor or therapist if you are struggling with anxiety or depression.
- Consider carrying a small notepad or use your cell phone for notes or for your “to do” list.
- Realize that your cognitive (brain) reaction time may be diminishing.

## Medical

- Get an annual physical examination by your doctor or medical provider. Because you likely have spent thousands of hours in the sunlight, make sure moles on your skin are checked.
- Have your eyes checked annually by an eye doctor (ophthalmologist or optometrist).
- See the dentist at least two times a year for checkups.
- Have your ears checked for hearing loss. Hearing is important for safety.
- Take your medications as prescribed.
- Tell others when you don’t feel well.
- Wear a medical bracelet to designate a health condition (if applicable).
- Communicate with local rescue personnel regarding your health condition(s) as a way to inform them in preparation for a possible emergency. Or consider keeping a list of your medical conditions and medications taken in your wallet or purse.
- Learn the signs and symptoms of a heart attack.
- If applicable, obtain reputable apps for your smartphone to monitor health and activity such as heartbeat, breaths/minute, steps taken, etc.
- Have a medical directive (living will).

## Economic, Financial, Legal

- Plan for a secure retirement by consulting with an attorney, accountant, and/or business advisor.
- Consult with your business advisor about creating an estate plan.
- Create a financial plan and monthly household income/expense budget.
- Have an up-to-date last will and testament. This is an official, notarized document addressing what happens to your assets after your death.
- Consider creating a Financial Power of Attorney.
- Automate your financial transactions – Set-up bill paying with your local bank.
- Have durable powers of attorney for health care and property
- Create an information list of important items such as bank account information, computer passwords, etc. for your family members and heirs.
- Settle any ongoing legal and/or financial disputes.

## Miscellaneous

- Meet with others on the farm on a regular basis such as daily check-ins to start the day; weekly family talks about tasks to accomplish for the week; or employee meetings. These meetings could help with accountability as it relates to your safety.
- Be receptive to those who are willing to assist you with tasks or chores.
- Be willing to take advice in work-related matters concerning your health and safety.
- Develop routines for specific tasks (or sets of tasks) on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

- Avoid handling animals that are larger than yourself.
- Consider carrying a cane for support and/or protection.



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