



## Health hazards are often overlooked risks on the farm

### Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

When you hear of hazards around a farm, what comes to mind? Tractors? Livestock?

But what about health risks like excessive noise and sun exposure?

Health hazards are often overlooked risks in farming. And while quite different from the dangers posed by farm machinery, health risks require the same proactive attention and prevention strategies as other farm hazards.

"The success of a farm is dependent on a farmer's well-being. There are a lot of health hazards that can affect a farmer's health, whether that's hearing, sun, respiratory, or ergonomic, and they are equally as important as other safety matters on the farm," explains Kendra Ulmer, manager and clinical director of the Agricultural Health and Safety Network at the University of Saskatchewan's [Canadian Centre for Rural and Agricultural Health](#).

"If your health is compromised, that can create more safety risks. You can't separate health and safety in agriculture; they go hand in hand."

A notable health hazard around the farm is noise-induced hearing loss, which can occur at any age from prolonged exposure to loud noises or as a result of a sudden loud incident, such as being near a tractor tire that blows. And there is no shortage of loud noises on the farm from machinery, livestock, power tools, ventilation fans, and more.

In fact, farmers and farm workers experience one of the highest rates of noise-induced hearing loss among all occupations. What's more, research has found that almost 50 per cent of farm youth show some signs of noise-induced hearing loss compared to non-farming youth. Signs of hearing loss can include favouring one ear over the other, difficulty hearing high-pitched sounds, ringing or buzzing in the ears, frequently asking people to repeat what they said, and cranking the volume up high on the TV or radio.

"The important thing to recognize about hearing is that once it's gone, it's gone. Hearing aids can help but they don't replace your hearing," explains Ulmer.

"Noise-induced hearing loss is permanent and it is irreversible, but it is also 100 per cent preventable. That's why it's so important to protect the hearing of children and youth on the farm because the damage done when someone is young stays with them forever."

In addition to potentially increasing incidents on the farm due to being unable to hear warning sounds, Ulmer notes that hearing loss can also affect a person's overall health,



