

## Farm Noise

Noise from farm tools and machinery can cause permanent hearing loss. Hearing loss may be temporary at first, but repeated exposure will lead to permanent damage. The damage can occur gradually over a number of years and remain unnoticed until it is too late. Some noises, such as gunshots, are so loud they can cause immediate permanent damage.

The noise exposure standard for an eight hour day is 90 dB(A). The exposure standard for peak noise - for example gunshot - is 140 dB.

### Spot the hazard

Some early warning signs of hearing loss include:

- ringing in the ears after work;
- difficulty understanding a normal conversation;
- turning up the volume on radio or television when others appear to hear adequately;
- failing to hear background noises, such as a ringing telephone or doorbell.

Typical farm noises that can damage hearing include:

- tractor (95-100dB(A))
- header (88-90dB(A))
- orchard sprayer (85-100dB(A))
- angle grinder (95-105dB(A))
- bench grinder (90-95dB(A))
- chainsaw (105-120dB(A))
- pig shed at feed time (95-105dB(A))
- shotgun (over 140 dB(lin)).

### Assess the risk

If you have to shout above noise to be heard by someone a 3 feet away, your hearing could be at risk. If noise cannot be reduced or removed at its source, and if there is no other way to separate people from damaging noise exposure, protective hearing equipment must be worn. Some farmers employ a noise consultant to take noise readings, assess hearing risks and recommend preventive measures.

### Make the changes

You can reduce noise at its source by:

- purchasing quieter machinery and equipment;
- modifying equipment to reduce noise;
- keeping machinery well maintained;
- if practicable, running machinery at lower revs.

You can protect people from loud noise exposure by:

- limiting the time workers spend in a noisy environment.
- isolating work areas from noisy machinery using distance or insulation;
- scheduling noisy work when fewer workers are around;
- using job rotation to alternate noisy jobs with quiet ones.

### Protective equipment

- Where noise exposure cannot be reduced, hearing protection should be worn, e.g. on open tractors, when shooting, or when using a chainsaw.

- Try on ear muffs before buying, to ensure comfort and a sound-proof fit.
- The higher the SLC 80 (sound level conversion) figure for hearing protection, the higher the protection.
- Use lower SLC 80 muffs for moderately noisy jobs - a high rating might mask out important danger warning sounds.
- Ear plugs may be more comfortable for some farmers, but must be inserted with clean hands. Re-usable plugs must be cleaned regularly. Cotton wool is not sufficient.
- Clean and maintain hearing protectors. Replace worn or damaged parts. Keep protectors near the area of noisy activity, e.g. in the tractor cab.
- Wear a combination of ear muffs and ear plugs when shooting.

**Remember:** Once hearing is gone, it is gone forever, and hearing aids are of little help. They can make speech louder, but they cannot make it clearer.