Agriculture: Safe Lifting and Carrying Techniques

Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

When lifting or carrying heavy objects, you must use the proper techniques to avoid injury. Many workers are in a hurry, and do not take the time to pay attention to their form or consider the weight of what it is they are handling. In addition, a lot of workers do not ask for help to reduce the load, thus decreasing the weight they are attempting to lift and avoiding injury.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Back injury is a common occurrence in agriculture. Lifting and throwing hay bales, lifting and moving equipment, and working on animal hooves are some tasks that put constant strain on the back. This overexertion can cause severe discomfort or injury, causing lost work and, in time, permanent disability.

EXAMPLE

A sheep farmer spent over two decades of shearing and lifting his herd. He felt the discomfort and spasms at the end of the day, but applied cold and hot compresses, took over the counter painkillers, and proceeded to handle the sheep as normal the next day. He did not heed the warning signs his back was giving him and continued to overexert his back by using improper form when lifting and shearing. One day, while lifting a large, injured ewe, he felt a pop in his lower back and the immediate sharp, intolerable pain that followed. He had ruptured two discs and spent months in recovery.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Follow these guidelines to avoid damage to your back.

Before You Lift

- ***Prepare*** your back. After sitting for long periods of time, try to avoid heavy lifting immediately after. Stand, walk around and stretch.
- ***Plan*** your route by clearing the way of potential obstacles, ensure the area you are moving the load is decided and cleared for placing and, if possible, avoid placing on the floor.
- ***Get assistance*** for loads that are awkward or too heavy for you to manage alone.

Proper Lifting Techniques

- Establish a wide base of support by standing with your feet shoulder width apart and keep the load as close to your body as possible. Keep your elbows slightly bent and your upper arms straight.
- Bend your knees and keep a slight inward curve in your lower back. Do not lift with a rounded back.
- Lift one end of the load to gauge its weight and determine if it is safe to move alone.
- Hold onto the load with your whole hand, not just your fingers, and keep the load balanced.
- Lift with your legs, not your back. Lift smoothly and slowly without sudden movements.
- Face in the direction of where you are taking the load. Turn with your feet and avoid twisting your body.

Team Lifting

- If possible, the people assisting you should be the same size.
- Enlist one person to coordinate and direct the move.
- Ensure workers know not to lift the load too soon or shift suddenly. Everyone should be aware of and practice safe lifting and carrying techniques in the workplace.

FINAL WORD

Safe carrying and lifting methods are simple and will make all the

difference. Using improper form, lifting, and moving loads quickly, neglecting to plan and prepare your route to transport the load and trying to lift heavy, awkward loads without help will all contribute to gradual and/or sudden back injury. Be sure to follow these guidelines to keep your back in check.