



# Tractor Talks

## Ergonomics

### Tips for Talking

- **Plan ahead.** Be familiar and comfortable with the topic.
- **Make it relevant.** Include related tasks and work areas or events.
- **Involve the workers.** Ask questions that lead to participation. See suggestions under "Discussion Drivers."

### What went wrong?

*January 13, 4:30 p.m.*

For the last 2 weeks, Hank had tried to work in spite of his shoulder pain but, ibuprofen wasn't helping. Laying in bed seemed to make the pain worse, so he had been sleeping in a chair. After leaving the farm this afternoon, Hank decided to go to the urgent care center. The doctor discovered that in addition to significant shoulder pain and difficulty sleeping, Hank couldn't raise his arm above shoulder level. An MRI confirmed a serious rotator cuff injury likely caused by repeatedly pulling loaded carts from the field to the pack house. The doctor scheduled Hank for surgery and estimated that he would be out of work for at least 3 months. **What went wrong?**

### Ergonomics

It's not news that farm work is hard work! Agricultural workers are exposed to repetitive motions, awkward positions, heavy lifting, and other physically demanding tasks on a daily basis. To perform this work in the safest way possible, remember these tips:

- **Lifting** — Use dollies, pallet trucks or carts to reduce manual lifting. Containers that must be lifted should have handles to help reduce lifting strain. Keep container, bag, or box weights below 50 lbs.
- **Pulling** — Avoid pulling carts or mobile equipment; use a pushing force instead.
- **Reaching** — Keep frequently used tools and other items within 17 inches and below shoulder height.
- **Hand Tools** — You should be able to grip the tool's handle all the way around with your forefinger and thumb overlapping. The handle should be covered with smooth, slip-resistant material.
- **Stooping and bending** — Avoid stooping and bending by using tools with long handles. Alternate stooped work with tasks that involve walking or sitting.

### Pay Attention to These Symptoms:

When performed correctly, your daily work activities shouldn't cause pain or discomfort. If you experience any of these symptoms, tell your supervisor, he or she may have ideas for a solution.

- |                    |                                      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • <b>Pain</b>      | • <b>Swelling</b>                    |
| • <b>Tingling</b>  | • <b>Change in skin color</b>        |
| • <b>Weakness</b>  | • <b>Clumsiness</b>                  |
| • <b>Numbness</b>  | • <b>Decrease in range of motion</b> |
| • <b>Tightness</b> | • <b>Loss of muscle function</b>     |

### Discussion Drivers

1. How could Hank's shoulder injury have been prevented?
2. Have you experienced any of the symptoms listed? What activities (at work or home) could have contributed?
3. What can you do to keep your body safe and pain free while performing your job?

For a free copy of "Simple Solution: Ergonomics for Farmworkers" visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2001-111/pdfs/2001-111.pdf>

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