

# AMPUTATION

## Teacher Fact Sheet

### Background:

- Farm work ranks in the top three industries as the most hazardous type of work in the United States. (Mining and Construction are the other two.) (National Safety Council 1998)
- Amputations are 2 ½ times more likely to occur in farming than in any other industry (Demers and Rosenstock, 1991).
- As much as 11% of all ag injuries are amputations (Zhou and Roseman, 1994).
- Farmers who have suffered amputations from farm injuries say getting in a hurry and not following safety rules cost them their limb (Reed, 1996).
- The cost of the hospitalization for an arm or leg loss is high (\$500 to \$1000 per day), and the cost of even a simple prosthesis (artificial limb) is thousands of dollars. Artificial limbs cost more than Chevy pickups or Dodge Ram trucks, ranging from \$15,000 to well over \$20,000.

### How limb loss occurs:

- Entanglement: Loss of fingers, toes, even arms and legs are not uncommon in farming. Usually the injury is due to getting caught in a moving part of the machinery. Clothes, gloves, dangling strings and long hair catch easily in rotating power take-off stubs and shafts, in belts and pulleys, and in moving parts of balers and combines. The use of tighter clothing that tears easily and keeping hair pulled up and back will help prevent getting caught. Removing dangling strings from the bottom of jackets and shoes will prevent being pulled in.
- Remember, **“If it dangles, it tangles”**
- To prevent entanglement, the easiest rule to remember is SHUT DOWN THE MACHINERY. It is also important that others can't accidentally start the equipment while you are working on it. The second rule is DISABLE THE EQUIPMENT.
- Entrapment: Some equipment, like augers and combine heads, are designed to trap and pull. It is important to keep distance between yourself and these devices. Augers should always have guards in place and be turned off if you must work on them.
- Crushing: Post drivers and heavy machinery can fall or pin against you. Crushing injures the inside of the arm or leg, causing internal damage that may lead to amputation.
- Infection: Dirty wounds cause infection and often mean the limb must be removed, sometimes weeks or even months after the injury. Limb loss may occur instantly or the limb may survive the initial injury and not be able to be saved even after intensive therapy.

#### Results of limb loss:

- Physical: You will always look different. You will have to learn new ways of doing things, and constantly come up with new ways to perform activities. You will have to learn to use other body parts as substitutes for the lost limb and learn how to use an artificial limb. The limb loss will affect your balance, reaction time, and your overall health (shoulder problems, increased incidence of arthritis, “other parts wear out faster”)
- Psychological: You will have to prove to yourself and others that you can do a task. Your body will still think it has that missing part of you, and you will continue to feel pain and itching for years (“Phantom Pain”). You will have to think before you act, even in simple everyday things, always figuring out how to do things other people do without a second thought.
- Financial: Even if everything goes well, you will have to spend money on the prosthesis to keep it in working order. Many insurance companies only pay for one prosthesis so you may have to purchase replacements with your own money, taking from funds for other needs.
- Farm productivity: Someone else will have to do your share of farm labor for awhile. It takes about six months for the wound to really heal, and it has to be toughened up before you can wear an artificial limb. Your family and friends or hired labor will have to do your jobs. If the injury occurs during planting or harvest (most common times), crop quality may suffer because the attention and time will be focused on the injury and not the crop. If you return to farm work, you will be slower and it will take a lot of time to get the task done, until you adapt to new ways of doing work. Time is money.

#### Use these aides to emphasize injury prevention:

- Poster “How will you spend \$20,000?”
- Poster “Still running after your dreams?”
- Poster “Smart work choices help you reach your goal”
- Poster “If it dangles, it tangles”
- Video “Farming with an Upper Extremity Amputation” – Farmers who have continued to farm after their amputations share their stories. Also contains information on prosthetics and machinery/tool modifications. 23 minutes. 1995. 1/2" VHS videotape: \$75.00  
Available through Breaking New Ground (1146 ABE Building, West Lafayette, IN 47906, E-Mail: [bng@ecn.purdue.edu](mailto:bng@ecn.purdue.edu),  
Phone: (765) 494-5088, Toll-Free: (800) 825-4264  
<http://abe.www.ecn.purdue.edu/ABE/Extension/BNG/Resource%20Center/audiovisual.html>
- Special Breaking New Ground technical report: Farming with a Lower Extremity Amputation. (Available from Breaking New Ground Resource Center, Purdue University, 1146 ABE Building, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1146; <http://abe.www.ecn.purdue.edu/ABE/Extension/BNG/plowsharelist.html>)

See additional references included at the end of this section.