

Safety Issues

LISTEN UP!

Farming is loud, but it doesn't have to be. Find out how what you're hearing now could keep you from hearing later, and take some simple steps to protect yourself.

No one has to tell you farming is a business. Statistics verify that farmers experience greater hearing loss than people in other occupations. Prolonged exposure to any noise, ranging from the intensity of a properly muffled tractor pulling a baler, can cause hearing loss.

Dr. John May, a researcher at the New York State College of Veterinary Medicine and Health in Cornell University, points to the severity of the problem.

"In our screening of 338 randomly selected New York farmers, we have found hearing loss in 77%," he notes. "We view hearing loss as a major occupational health issue for farmers."

Ironically, noise-induced hearing loss starts silently. By the time those around you notice you can't hear as well, the damage may be irreversible.

Here are two important steps you can take to ensure you won't be robbed of this important sense.

First, try to control the sound around you. Make sure machine parts are well-lubricated. Repair or replace worn, loose or unbalanced chains, belts and other parts. Exchange out faulty mufflers, using replacements that meet or exceed the manufacturer's recommendations. Whenever possible, use machines that have cabs and keep windows closed.

Second, reduce your exposure to sounds. Earmuffs and earplugs block dangerous sounds but still allow you to hear.

Whatever form of hearing protection you choose, look for a noise reduction rating of 25 or higher. Also, read the label and be sure to follow the directions for proper use.

To find out whether you have a hearing problem, you



reference to a person with a hearing problem," Robison points out. FH

Sound Intensity Scale

Decibel (Noise) Level	Sound Source
15	Threshold of hearing
50—60	Normal conversation, background music
75—80	Road traffic, vacuum cleaner
80—85	Interior of a modern tractor cab
90+	Danger level
90—100	ATVs, tractors, combines without soundproof cabs
115—120	Chain saw, squealing pigs, loud rock music
140+	Shotgun blast, jet engine