

Farming for the Long Term: What's your body got to do with it?

A presentation for the Beginning Women Farmers Conference

By Ellen S. Gibson

Holistic Management International

UMass Amherst, March 22, 2012

Note: I will not be using Powerpoint and will bring my own CD player or computer for the music.

After we start out dancing to drumming music by Inanna and get the blood revved up, I will lead a short series of stretches.

Farming is hard work!

- *Ask the group:*
 - How many of you work with animals? What kinds?
 - What kinds of machinery do you use? Is it heavy? Does it vibrate? Have you ever had safety training?
 - What's the coldest weather you've experienced this winter when feeding the animals, or completing some outside task on the farm?
 - How do you cool yourself off in the summer when you're out in the garden harvesting, or out in the field baling hay?
- But isn't this why we farm?? To be physically active, working outside in beautiful settings, working with plants, working with animals, working with our hands

Some problems we can run into: why farming can take its toll on the body

- Repetitive motion, heavy lifting, bending, vibration, pressure on joints
- Accidents and injuries
- Arthritis

How to avoid problems. Pain and injuries are not inevitable!!

- Listen to your body. Take frequent breaks to stretch when you're doing physically (or mentally) demanding work. (Depending on energy of group, may stop group here and have everyone stretch together for two minutes.)
- Dealing with hot weather.
 - Drink water when it's hot. Wear a hat. Wear sunscreen. Avoid too much sun exposure. Danger of sun stroke.
- Dealing with cold weather.
 - Drink tea when it's cold (still important to stay hydrated). Dress in layers. Reschedule priorities if the weather is just too cold. Warning signs of hypothermia—how to avoid.
- Dealing with dusty environments
 - Ventilation is really important! Use a safety certified dust mask.

Take care of yourself. Simple proactive things you can do:

- Discuss ergonomics
- Discuss assistive technology

- Demonstrate tools to illustrate concepts
 - How to shovel snow
 - How to keep in a neutral position doing repetitive motions
 - Adaptive gardening techniques
- What about food and diet?
 - Eat food. Eat less of it. Mostly plants—the adage by Michael Pollen
 - The new evolution diet: eat like a caveman—Turning conventional nutrition information on its head. It’s all about keeping insulin from spiking and blood sugar levels lower.
 - Also by Michael Pollen, *Food Rules*, a great little guidebook for eating well for a lifetime
- What about mental health?
 - Mental Health First Aid is a program started in Australia, where farmers were experiencing a high degree of depression because of long-term drought. MHFA is a program to teach lay people risk factors and warning signs of the most common and prevalent mental illnesses, to learn active listening techniques, to gain understanding to reduce stigma, and other actions to take
- *Ask people to relate their own techniques.*

Summing up, I will discuss AgrAbility cases we have seen: farmers with knee replacements, sciatica, describing daily pain as 9-10, and how we can help farmers, farm families, and farm workers.

Handouts: AgrAbility has rack cards that have information about the program and contacts on one side, and health guidelines on the other, re: stretches and arthritis.

In addition, I will have a page of resources for further information.

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Resources

This is a partial list. In the linked in world of the Internet, a search will lead you in many directions. When you find a great website, let me know! egibson22@megalink.net

The National AgrAbility Project

<http://agrability.org/>

Check this website for many resources of tools and information. See especially the Toolbox , a searchable database of assistive technology solutions for farmers and gardeners. State AgrAbility programs specialize in specific areas. For example:

Arkansas AgrAbility

<http://www.ar-ican.org/publications.html>

Information on many kinds of assistive technology, from working with computers, to working in the kitchen, to working in the fields.

Missouri AgrAbility

<http://agrability.missouri.edu/GardenWeb/>

Gardens for Every Body—Adaptive gardening

West Virginia AgrAbility

<http://greenthumbs.cedwvu.org/factsheets/>

Accessible gardening fact sheets cover a wide range of gardening options: from hydroponics, to lasagna gardening, to hay bale gardening. A really informative site.

Ohio AgrAbility

<http://agrability.osu.edu/factsheets.html>

Ohio has produced a number of informative worksheets on various topics, including ergonomics, Universal Design, lifting, and heat stress.

Mental Health First Aid

http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/program_overview/

A public education program to enable laypeople to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

Universal Design

<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/design-projects/udi/center-for-universal-design>

The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University is a center for research on Universal Design. UD is the idea that all environments and products, to the greatest extent possible, are usable by everyone regardless of their age, ability, or circumstance.

Ergonomic Tools

Green Heron Tools

<http://greenherontools.com/>

High-quality agricultural tools designed especially for women

Lowe's/Home Depot (may only be on the floor seasonally)

- Garden Kneeler/Bench, about \$20.00
- Knee Pads, about \$9.00
- Tippy Garden Stool (like Kelley has), about \$20.00
- Fiskars Powergear tools (have 'ease of use' commendation from Arthritis Foundation, said to be 3 times more effective than regular tools) \$20-50.00
- Panel Handle, \$40.00

Radius Garden Tools www.radiusgarden.com

- Ergonomically designed hand tools, \$10.00
- Long and specialty handled rakes, hoes, shovels, \$30-50.00

Clean Air Gardening www.cleanairgardening.com

- Detachable ergonomic 4 in 1 tool set, \$29.99

Life with Ease www.lifewithease.com

- Fist grip add on handles and arm support (can add to any tool) \$29.95

Florian Tools www.floriantools.com

- Ratcheting tools use strength of tool rather than strength of user \$32.95-\$200.00

Viscolas www.viscolas.com

- Padding/grips to wrap around tools to reduce vibration/shock to the hand \$17.95

Most of these are available on Amazon, which makes shopping a bit easier.

Center for Rural Affairs

<http://www.cfra.org/>

Supporting rural communities, working on policy issues to support small farms and make agriculture a more level playing field—an all around good resource on policy.