

# Farm Workers Should Protect Hearing

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Many farmers have something in common with many rock musicians: hearing damage. Farmers should take steps to protect their hearing before it's too late, says a safety expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Loud rock music averages about 115 decibels," says Dr. Dennis Murphy, professor of agricultural and biological engineering. "Farm noise ranges between 90 and 140 decibels, well above the 85-decibel limit at which industrial employers are mandated to provide hearing protection for workers."

Consistent, repeated exposure to such volumes can damage hearing before you notice any change, Murphy warns. "You may even think you're getting used to the noise, but it's more likely that

you've already acquired a mild hearing loss."

Hearing loss has warning signs, however. "Ringing, buzzing or whirring in your ears may indicate temporary hearing loss," says Murphy. "If you listen to the radio or television at a volume uncomfortable to others, you may have some damage. Frequently asking people to speak up also may indicate hearing loss."

How can you tell if you need noise protection? "If you need to shout to be heard three feet away, the noise is too loud," Murphy says. "Reduce the noise level or wear hearing protection. Protecting your hearing today can save you a lot of misery tomorrow."

Even though surveys show farmers recognize the hazards of excessive noise, they rarely use hearing protection. "Some farmers believe that ear protection is

inconvenient, unhandy or too time-consuming," Murphy says. "It may take some getting used to, but the benefits far outweigh any inconvenience."

Noise protection devices come in two basic forms — muffs that fit over the ears and plugs that fit inside. On average, these devices reduce noise volume by about 25 decibels. They are available from health and safety catalogs, drug and sporting goods stores or through licensed audiologists.

When choosing hearing protection, consider cost, comfort and effectiveness. "Muffs are comfortable for longer wearing times but are not effective when obstructed by glasses or hats," Murphy says. "Hearing plugs are less noticeable than muffs and are small enough to fit in a pocket."

Disposable ear plugs may cost less than \$1. Muffs cost from \$5 to

\$80. "Disposable plugs are convenient, but can become expensive if used regularly," he says. "Reusable plugs or muffs are a better choice for frequent wearers."

Activities such as shooting guns, listening to loud music or attending loud concerts and sporting events also can damage your hearing.

## Producer Salmonella Meeting Set

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — An open meeting for Pennsylvania egg producers regarding Salmonella enteritidis (SE) has been scheduled for Friday, January 28, at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center.

The meeting is jointly sponsored by the Penn State Extension Service and the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation. The meeting begins at noon with a complimentary lunch provided by the Federation.

The afternoon program includes presentations on effective

rodent control and a discussion of the Pennsylvania Egg Quality Assurance Program (PEQAP).

Rodents are considered the primary source of recontamination of poultry houses. PEQAP is the voluntary SE monitoring program available to Pennsylvania egg producers.

Scientists will be joined by several egg producers in discussing these topics.

For more information, contact John D. Hoffman, Pennsylvania Poultry Federation, 500 N. Progress Ave., Harrisburg, PA 17109.

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