



## A Critique on Fatigue

Human fatigue is known to be both mental and physical. It is often blamed for farm workplace incidents that result in serious injury and death. And, just like other conditions that impact the human body, much of the detrimental effect from fatigue can be prevented.

But before we explore the prevention of fatigue, let's look closer at the causes. Some types of fatigue are known to be physiological. This means that they are the result of chemical reactions that leave muscles exhausted. Farm work is rampant with these fatigue factors. Included among them is the lack of sleep, especially around planting and harvest seasons. While farmers believe they are getting enough sleep to offset the hard work required during critical work seasons, the body must be given even more time to recover from the added physical stress that accompanies these seasons.

Other fatigue factors include extreme temperatures such as cold winter weather, or the sultry conditions found in many farming regions during the summer. Loud noise is also considered to be a physiological fatigue factor. Excessive exposure to loud noise while performing their work clearly demonstrates that permanent hearing loss is common among agricultural workers.

Another type of fatigue is psychological in nature. This fatigue is caused by mental situations such as: frustration with the weather, commodity prices or malfunctioning equipment; boredom while performing tedious work; and sorting out the decision-making process such as "when to sell" or "what to plant."

When psychological fatigue sets in, the body's energy is sapped and the farmer may have a feeling of general weariness. According to Dr. Randy Weigel of the Iowa State University Extension Service, this is when it's particularly important for farmers to eat well-balanced meals and gain the nutrition that produces energy and rebuilds muscle strength. It would also be a good time to get a little extra rest in the form of a nap or more adequate sleep.

Dr. Weigel suggests these handy hints for reducing fatigue among farmers and ranchers:

1. Plan for regular work breaks in the morning and afternoon.
2. Eat an energy producing snack while on your break.
3. Take at least a 10 minute break. Anything shorter may not be long enough.

He also suggests these tricks for getting the required amount of sleep:

1. Prepare for sleep by slowing down your thinking at least one-half hour before bed time.
2. Take the time to get ready for bed. A leisurely bath would be nice!
3. If you are not feeling sleepy, read a book at bed time. It should be non-fiction.
4. Try going to bed before you feel ready for sleep. This type of sleep is the most restful.

--Dr. Sam Steel

Director, National Education Center for Agricultural Safety

A partnership of the National Safety Council and Northeast Iowa Community College

*Copyright 2002 \* National Safety Council \* All Rights Reserved.*