

Can you hear me now?

One time I asked an audiologist early on in my career what the best hearing protection devices were, especially for farmers. She told me “Anything they are willing to wear.” Ha, I suppose that could be said about most Personal Protective Equipment. There are items that we consider “best” but a clear reminder that something is always better than nothing.

Hopefully many farmers are finally putting away the combines and thinking about seed and other things for the 2022 growing season. As we enter into months of giving thanks and celebration for the year, making family favorite recipes, perhaps making candy, and passing out gifts, it’s time to give the gift of a health check-up and one we shouldn’t let pass is our hearing.

The American Academy of Audiology reports that more than 40 million Americans, aged 20 to 69, have some type of hearing loss with approximately 10 million of those attributable to noise-induced hearing loss.

Lengthy or repeated exposure to noise above 85 decibels can damage hearing. So how loud are exposures to those in agriculture? Let’s take a look based on information from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Centers for Disease Control.

	Decibels
Normal Conversation	60 dB
Lawn Mower/Hair dryer	90 dB
Tractor	96 dB
Hand Drill	97 dB
Squealing Pigs	100 dB
Chain Saw	112 dB
Gun Shots	140 dB

Knowing the Warning Signs

- Raising your voice to be heard at arms length
- Feeling of “fullness” in your ears
- Repeatedly saying “Huh? What?”
- Ringing in your ears
- Turning up the radio/TV

Hearing loss isn’t just about hearing though. Studies have shown that long term hearing loss can effect other aspects of our health. Those with hearing loss can also see an overall issue with brain health or cognitive decline as they age and may attribute to an earlier onset of dementia. Ongoing stress can effect digestive health issues such as an upset stomach, muscle tension, anxiety, etc. As a result of hearing loss, you may have social

withdrawal or become more irritable. Lack of focus can also become an issue. Relations can also suffer from hearing loss due to frustration, embarrassment, etc.

Like other things, farmers and their families often just accept that hearing loss is a normal occupational hazard and they move on, or they think it is too late. It is not too late. There are many options to improve hearing loss and even more to preventing it. We need to encourage our younger generations to do better because now there are many options.

True, something is always better than nothing but perhaps this holiday season, you do a little research on common exposures in your environment and purchase some hearing protection for yourself and others in your operation.

For more information, please contact the Carle Center for Rural Health and Farm Safety at 365-7961 or visit www.carle.org/farmsafety