



# Safety Tips for Farming with Quadriplegia<sup>1</sup>

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The Easter Seal Society

Quadriplegia means paralysis in all four limbs. The degree of paralysis may vary depending on the level of injury to the spinal cord. The following is a list of safety tips that have been shared by farmers affected by quadriplegia.

1. When using a manlift on a tractor someone should assist with the transfer process to prevent excessive bruising by guiding your legs through the tractor doorway and assisting the transfer from the wheelchair to the manlift and from the manlift to the tractor seat. The manlift should be used only by the person with a disability. The manlift should never be operated while the tractor is in motion. No one should ride on the manlift while the tractor is in motion.
2. To prevent potential skin breakdown while operating farm machinery, various wheelchair cushions can be used. Modifications can also be made to the tractor seat to provide better upper body stability by using ergonomically designed or custom made cushions and a chest belt.
3. A seatbelt should also be used on manlifts to provide safety and security.
4. Padding of hand controls or restraining of legs using a belt should be considered to prevent bruising or scraping during a leg spasm while you are operating the tractor.
5. All hand controls installed in the tractor should be constructed using appropriate standards and guidelines to ensure safe and effective use of controls.
6. A fire extinguisher should be available within the cab of the tractor.
7. Rollover protective structures are recommended on all equipment.
8. For tractors without a cab, special care should be taken to prevent sunburn and heat stroke during the summer by wearing a cooling vest, drinking lots of fluids, installing an overhead canopy, bringing water along, or performing field work during times in which there is less exposure to heat (ie, early mornings, evenings, or nighttime).
9. During winter months, warm clothing should be worn to protect against exposure or frostbite due to decreased circulation. Quilted material wrapped around lower extremities, leg-warmers, modified "Snug Sacks", Alaskan mukluks, and other materials can be used to keep upper and lower extremities warm. Downhill ski shops are a source for good ideas.
10. Keep an outdoor communication device with you to use in case of emergency. These devices include: FM/business band radio, cellular phone, and a push-button alarm system. Modifications to these devices may be needed for safe and effective use.
11. Try to avoid direct access with livestock. Restructure of these tasks so that they can be done by another person. Use labor-saving worksite modifications including fence line feeders, automated feed systems, automatic gate openers, raised decks, and livestock holding equipment.

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1. The information shared is based on data gathered by the Easter Seal Society of Iowa's Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program through financial support from the Injury Prevention Research Center at the University of Iowa Grant #R49\CCR703640-02 funded by the Center for Disease Control. No scientific research has been conducted to determine if the above tips or suggestions are safe or effective. The information shared is simply ideas shared by farmers affected by disabilities of the staff at the FaRM Program. For more information or clarification contact the FaRM Program at (515) 289-1933 or submit comments or questions to P. O. Box 4002, Des Moines, Iowa, 50333.

12. For farmers with spinal cord injuries and preexisting respiratory impairments, dust, mold, dander from livestock and other respiratory irritants should be avoided, especially if your spinal cord injury results in decreased function of diaphragm or lung capacity. There is a concern that individuals with higher-level spinal cord injuries and several years of working in livestock handling facilities could be more susceptible to pneumonia.
13. Other labor-saving technologies such as automatic hitching devices and bin level indicators should be considered as well as job restructuring of those tasks that are difficult or hazardous to perform.
14. Any adaptations or modifications intended for use by an individual with a disability should be used by that individual only. Use of a modification or adaptation by another individual could result in an injury.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information on general farm safety, contact Iowa State University's Cooperative Extension Office