

We often tell kids to turn their music down, but have you ever considered the impact of loud machinery on your hearing?

Loud rock music is not the only thing that could be damaging to the future hearing ability of our next generation of farmers. While hearing loss is usually associated with the elderly, it doesn't usually happen overnight.

Those who live and work on the farm are in close proximity to many loud noises such as running tractors, machinery, tools, and livestock. It's never too early to be concerned about exposure to high noise levels on the farm. Farm residents and visitors should not be exposed to deafening decibel levels.

Continuous sounds of more than 85 decibels are considered hazardous. If you have to shout to be heard three feet away the noise level is probably greater than 85 decibels.

When pigs squeal the noise level can reach 130 decibels. Distance from the noise source also impacts the exposure. As a person moves away from the sound, the decibels drop off quickly. The key is to keep noisy items as far away as possible. When that's not possible wear hearing protection.

The noisy farm environment has taken its toll on many farm operators' hearing capabilities. To prevent children from early hearing loss:

- ▶ Keep children away from loud machinery and equipment
- ▶ Encourage kids to stay inside when the lawn mower is being used
- ▶ Do not allow children in confined livestock areas, especially when the animals are being handled
- ▶ If children cannot avoid loud noises insist they wear hearing protection
- ▶ Be an example - wear your own hearing protection

Hearing protection devices such as muffs and ear plugs are available but may take some adjustment. The longterm benefit outweighs any short-term inconveniences from wearing muffs or plugs.

Don't you want to hear your grandkids say "I love you" someday?