

Rural industry Sprains and strains prevention fact sheet



High risk rural industry occupations¹

- general farmhand
- fruit, vegetable and nut farmhand
- labourer and related worker
- fishing hand
- heavy truck driver
- rural trainee
- beef cattle farmer
- forestry worker

Common manual task injuries

- sprains and strains to the back, knees and shoulders
- spinal disorders (e.g. ruptured discs)
- hernias

Common cause of manual task injury

- handling and restraining live animals
- uncoupling equipment
- lifting and carrying loads (e.g. fence posts)
- bending and reaching when performing tasks (e.g. handling animals including drenching and dipping)
- repeated bending and awkward positions (e.g. vegetable picking)
- slips, trips and falls from tractors and machinery

¹ Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Strategy Health and Community Services Industry Action Plan 2004–07

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Animal handling – a case study

A farmhand, 27, has worked with live animals and moved bales of hay and bags of potatoes around for years. The farmhand didn't really notice his back hurting even though he felt twinges now and then. However, one day he carries a struggling sheep into the shearing shed. The farmhand drops the animal and doubles over with pain. He will not return to work, nor is he capable of activities with his children.

Identify the problem

An analysis of farmhand duties shows workers are handling animals and heavy, awkward objects.

Assess the risk

Are any risk factors present?

- **Working postures:** farmhands are undertaking actions which require high levels of force (i.e. handling live loads, and heavy and awkward bales and bags)
- **Repetition:** workers are restraining and carrying animals, and moving objects repetitively
- **Duration:** farmhands are working for more than two hours at a time, sometimes longer.

What are causing these risk factors?

- **Work area design:** the ground surface is uneven, ramps are traversed to enter the shearing shed; and work is undertaken in hot and cold conditions
- **Nature of the load:** struggling animals can require force to carry and restrain; and heavy bales and bags can be awkward to carry
- **Load handling:** animals are lifted incorrectly and carried over uneven surfaces and up ramps; live loads may need restraining.

Find the solutions

Can you eliminate the risk by redesigning the task or elements of the task?

- Use of mechanical aids (i.e. tailgate loaders or tractor platforms)
- Consider smaller bags for potatoes or bulk bags
- Control animals by use of animal restraining equipment such as an animal crush
- Reduce and avoid unsafe handling tasks
- Establish safer lifting techniques (e.g. semi-squat lifting and bracing should become habit)
- Discuss all proposed solutions with workers.

Can administrative controls be used to minimise risk?

- Task rotation
- Rest breaks
- Training for the task.

Review the controls

- Consult with workers regularly to ensure controls have minimised risk and have not introduced new risks.