

“The boundaries of many jobs simply are not elastic enough to make room for workers’ hearts and spirits.”

John P. Schuster



Six Attributes of Jobs that Tap Motivation

Often jobs can be made more satisfying by structuring the work to allow employees greater scope, give them a sense of continuity and completeness, and encourage them to stretch their minds and sharpen their skills in accomplishing the tasks up to the expected standard. Attributes of such jobs usually include:

- Doing a whole job from beginning to end
- Regular contact with other employees, suppliers, and customers
- Duties or tasks that use a variety of skills
- Freedom to act independently, with choices about how to do the work
- Feedback from results, with standards built in against which success can be measured soon
- Opportunity for growth

Applying Ergonomic Principles

Even if manual, routine tasks are not intellectually fulfilling, most do not have to hurt as much as they do. Aches, pains, strains, and sprains—especially in the back, shoulders, hands, and arms—are probably the most common health problem for people who work in agriculture. These “work-related musculo-skeletal disorders” (WMSD) are unfortunate byproducts of the repetitive reaching, gripping, carrying, bending, squatting, kneeling, and twisting involved in field and ranch jobs. They not only feel bad and reduce the earning opportunity for workers but also raise absenteeism, operational problems, and insurance premiums.

A simple low- or no-cost change in task procedure, tool, or immediate environment can often reduce risks of WMSDs by improving ergonomics, the “fit” between the job and a person’s body and abilities. Ergonomic studies have yielded guidelines for the design and redesign of agricultural jobs. In general, a physical task is risky if it has to be performed repetitively over a long period, with great force, or in a position that feels awkward.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has published a booklet describing more than a dozen sets of minor tool and procedural adjustments to alleviate ergonomic problems in nursery, grape, salad green, blueberry, and other types of production. The entirety of *Simple Solutions: Ergonomics for Farm Workers* (NIOSH, 2001), and a summary list of specific ergonomic tips adapted from it, are available through AgHelpWanted.org.