Purpose/Objective:
Agriculture continues to be a deadly industry, especially for older workers. The fatality rate for farmers aged 55 and over is estimated to be 45.8 deaths/100,000 workers. The purpose of this study was to explore older farmers’ perspectives of their farm work, associated risks, and methods to decrease that risk.

Methods/Efforts:
Following IRB approval, focus groups and personal interviews were conducted with 71 farmers and adult family members in 5 states. Demographic data was obtained via a personal profile completed prior to data collection. Work risk assessment was accomplished through a written risk appraisal and subsequent discussion. Flip chart notes recorded during group sessions facilitated clarification and confirmation of rudimentary themes. Further thematic analysis was accomplished by consensus of the research team.

Results/Findings:
Farmers wanted to continue their work but acknowledged that physical and mental changes sometimes placed them at risk for injury. Slowed reflexes, limited range of motion, and fatigue led the list of challenges. Technological advances in equipment and administrative programming were met with mixed reviews. Farmers were not as concerned about risk to self as about their actions injuring others. Family members had very different perspectives about the older farmers’ risks, noting that it was difficult to have conversations about declining work ability, and citing a respect for the older farmers’ decision to remain active. Family members were most concerned that work restrictions would “break their [older farmer] spirits.” Highest risks cited by both farmers and family members were work involving tractors, livestock, machinery, and climbing. Farmers’ risk identification is congruent with the leading causes of injury and death to this age group.

Application to Field Research:
The number of aging farmers continues to escalate, with the average age now 57.7. Older farmers plan to continue their farm work but recognize that changes may be needed. They understand changing health status but are less likely to fully acknowledge their work limitations, which makes it more difficult for family members to facilitate older farmers’ work adaptations. Health care providers and others who serve the agricultural community should tailor their counseling and advice in terms of work, risk reduction, and energy conservation. More work is needed to identify and develop injury prevention interventions that are acceptable to the farm community.