

## STANDING FLEXIBILITY ACTIVITIES

### FARMER'S STRETCH

This is a wonderful stretch for the whole front of the body. It stretches the hip flexors, abdominal wall, chest, and shoulders. It reminds me of a farmer surveying his fields, with his hands in his suspenders and his shoulders drawn back with pride. His back may be aching from the day's work, but he's thinking, "What a beautiful sight my fields are!" See if you can get participants to notice how deep breaths help the stretch. If the stretch hurts, participants can try standing with offset feet (instead of parallel).

#### **Benefits** »

- Stretches the frequently tight hip flexors.
- Stretches the abs, chest, and back.
- Strengthens the postural muscles that bring the shoulder blades together.
- Provides some relief for sciatic pain.
- Includes an element of balance because it is done standing.

#### **How to Do It** »

##### **The Start**

Participants should stand in front of their chair with the back of their legs touching the chair. Feet should be wider than shoulder width, and hands are on the hips, if possible.

##### **The Moves**

Use the following cues to guide participants through the stretch.

- Inhale and push the hips forward enough that you feel a stretch across the front of the hips and abs. Exhale and hold the position.
- Tighten the gluteal muscles.
- Inhale again, and pull the elbows and shoulders gently back until you feel a stretch across the shoulders and chest.
- Exhale while holding the stretch.
- Draw the shoulder blades together and look up a little.
- Hold for 10 to 15 seconds, as tolerated and pain free.
- Return to the starting position, being careful for balance. March in place a bit to relax the legs.



#### **Give It More Balance** »

A modification of this stretch is to use offset feet; stand with one foot forward and one back. The hip flexors of the back leg are stretched. So do one side and then the other.

#### **Live It** »

This is an energizing stretch. It feels great when participants have been sitting a lot or when their back is tired. Squeezing the gluteal muscles really gives the sciatic nerve a rest.