

AgrAbility Harvest

An ingathering of
helpful information
on disability in
agriculture

Fall
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Jobs are a hot topic everywhere. With unemployment hovering at record levels, it's hard to listen very long to any public policy discussion without job creation coming to the forefront. Even now, the President is proposing new legislation to create jobs, part of a long line of bills with similar goals. It's encouraging that rural communities are receiving special attention in the employment policy discourse.

At its heart, AgrAbility is a rural job creation and retention program. The people it serves are accustomed to hard work and typically shun government handouts. What they need are the tools to keep making a living in agriculture after a disability, and AgrAbility staff members have a toolbox of potential solutions to help them. We contend that, unlike some public investments that depreciate, such as buildings, roads, and bridges, the taxpayers' investment in AgrAbility instead appreciates over time as our clients continue to keep working and contributing to society.

AgrAbility recently had a unique opportunity to share its "jobs" story at the Disability in Agriculture and Rural Life Forum in Washington, D.C. Leaders from the agriculture and disability communities were invited to participate and learn about AgrAbility through the stories of the people that the program has helped. Part of the purpose of the event was to celebrate AgrAbility's 20th anniversary, and to that end, the National AgrAbility Project (NAP) released its 20-year summary report, described in greater detail on p. 5.

In addition to panels of AgrAbility clients and rural professionals, Kareem Dale, Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy, was a featured speaker. Instead of merely greeting the group and giving an update on the Administration's policies, Mr. Dale took the time to learn more about AgrAbility and fielded numerous questions related to the program and to rural disability issues.

AgrAbility is indebted to the many leaders in agriculture, rehabilitation, and government who believe in our program and have kept it functioning and funded during its first 20 years of service.



A Closer Look

Making the Vet Connection



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A recent White House report indicated that while only 17% of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, rural residents account for 44% of our military. These rural veterans are returning to their farms, ranches, and rural communities with disabilities such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at high rates. Therefore, it is essential that the connection be made between these vets with disabilities and organizations, like AgrAbility, that can assist them.

AgrAbility Initiatives

AgrAbility has served veterans since its inception, but the program has recently focused specific initiatives on the special needs of this population. For example, Indiana AgrAbility is partnering with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) office in Indianapolis to develop a workshop for veterans, VA workers, and other professionals on opportunities in agriculture and the benefits of horticulture therapy for returning veterans. About four years ago, staff from

Kansas AgrAbility and the Dole VA Regional Office began a collaboration to meet the needs of veterans in Kansas. To date, eight farmers have received services and funding support for technology and modifications. Kansas AgrAbility is also beginning to assist staff at Fort Riley with the installation and operation of a hoop house and raised beds for accessible gardens. In addition, Kansas AgrAbility, Nebraska AgrAbility, and Missouri AgrAbility recently received a USDA grant to partner with other agencies in enhancing services to veterans in their states.

The NAP is also expanding public awareness activities focused on veterans at events such as the National Veterans Small Business Conference that was held in New Orleans in August.



This event drew some 3,000 participants for a wide range of educational and networking activities. The NAP is also sending an AgrAbility resource kit to VA hospitals participating in the Spinal Cord Injury Vocational Integration Program.



Collaborative Relationships and Specialized Programs

The NAP is also cultivating new relationships with other organizations that serve veterans. For example, in addition to having a representative from the American Legion on the National AgrAbility Advisory Team, the NAP recently welcomed the executive director of the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) to the team. Based in Davis, California, FVC seeks to create viable vocational opportunities in agriculture for veterans through such means as education and training, advocacy, mentoring, and a fellowship fund to help qualifying vets with schooling or in starting their agricultural enterprises. While not all those served by the Farmer Veteran Coalition are disabled, many are. Two such individuals were awarded scholarships to the 2011 AgrAbility National Training Workshop in Indianapolis, where they participated in a panel discussion with the FVC executive director.

Another program that seeks to integrate returning veterans into agriculture is Combat Boots to Cowboy Boots at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture. This program utilizes existing resources through such organizations as USDA, VA, and Small Business Administration to help participants become successful agricultural entrepreneurs. Similarly, the Entrepreneurial Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) offers experiential training in entrepreneurship and small business management for post-9/11 veterans who have a service-related disability. Currently provided through seven major

universities around the country, EBV offers training for any type of entrepreneurial venture, not just those related to agriculture.

Vets Helping Vets

Veterans themselves have initiated programs to assist other vets interested in agriculture. One such venture is Archi's Acres, a small-scale organic farm in Southern California started by former Marine Sergeant Colin Archipley and his wife Karen. They have developed a six-week Veterans Sustainable Agriculture Training program to provide opportunities in sustainable agriculture to combat veterans. Similarly, the Veterans Farm in Jacksonville, Florida has a 14-week fellowship program to teach veterans how to grow organic fruits and vegetables. One of their mottoes is "Prescription without Medication" through horticulture therapy, particularly for veterans with TBI and PTSD.

Resources for Caregivers and Vets

Having long recognized the importance of caregiving in the big picture of disability, AgrAbility has developed multiple resources in this area, including the To Everything There is a Season resource kit and the www.ruralcare.info website. The VA also acknowledges the crucial role of caregivers and recently expanded its services to those caring for post-9/11 veterans. These new benefits include monthly stipends, travel expenses, access to health insurance, mental health services, caregiver training, and respite care. For more information on services

and eligibility, see www.caregiver.va.gov.

Another innovative resource from the VA is the PTSD Coach, a smartphone application that provides users with information on PTSD, recommendations about reliable treatments, tools for screening and tracking symptoms, information on skills for handling stress, and links to support and help. A version for family members is scheduled for release soon. (The VA stresses that this resource is

a supplement to, not a replacement for, professional treatment.) The VA also offers a confidential, anonymous screening test for PTSD at their My HealthVet portal, www.myhealth.va.gov, which serves as a veterans' one-stop resource for VA benefits and resources.

Our veterans have made significant sacrifices to help preserve the freedoms we enjoy, and some have paid high prices for their service in the form of disabling conditions. AgrAbility looks forward to continuing to expand its role in the growing support network that helps these veterans transition back into civilian life, especially in rural areas.



Pickup Truck Access

For farmers and ranchers, pickup trucks rival dogs as man's (or woman's) best friend. These motorized workhorses are virtually indispensable on most agricultural operations, but can be difficult to access for those with mobility impairments.

Wheelchair accessible pickups. GoShichi LLC of Fort Wayne, IN, offers wheelchair-accessible conversions for GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado 1500- or 2500-series crew-cab model



pickup trucks. The conversions involve (1) a motorized horizontal mast under the crew-cab seat that extends the truck's entire side panel outward from the cab frame, and (2) a wheelchair-accommodating lift attached to the panel that lowers to the ground. Once chair and user are secured on the lift, it is raised and the panel retracted back into the cab frame, placing the user directly behind the steering wheel. (Passenger-side conversions are also available.) For more information, visit www.goshichi.com.

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Running board lifts. Designed primarily for individuals who can walk but have difficulty getting into and out of their pickup trucks or vans, Life Essentials, Inc. of Brookston, IN, offers various types of motorized running board lifts that either utilize or replace existing running boards or can be added to vehicles that have no running boards.

A removable seat can be installed for those who may have less mobility. Operated off the vehicle's battery, the lifts are activated by a wired controller inside the cab or by a hand-held remote. Cost runs about \$3,500 per lift (including installation) and \$300 for the remote. For more information, visit www.lifeessentialswb.com.



Stow-Away Transfer Seat

The Bruno Stow-Away Transfer Seat provides easy access to the higher front seat of a pickup truck or SUV for those with mobility impairments.

Stored underneath the vehicle in a sealed and protected container, the seat, on command from a hand-held control, emerges from the container, rises to the needed heights for transfer to the vehicle seat, and then returns back to the container. Costing about \$5,000, the Stow-Away requires no structural modifications, can be reinstalled on another vehicle, and comes with removable safety handle, hand-held pendant control, and removable seat pad. (Padded transfer plate optional.) For more information, go to www.bruno.com. ■

Resources for Success

20th anniversary summary published

The National AgrAbility Project recently completed a summary report of the program's 20-year history. Titled *AgrAbility: Cultivating Success in Agriculture, Employment, and Rural Life for People with Disabilities, 1991-2011 and Beyond*, the document made its debut at the Disability in Agriculture and Rural Life Forum in September.

Focusing on the theme that AgrAbility is "a small program with a big impact," the report summarizes the impact that the program has made in its primary priority areas: direct assistance, education, and networking. Also discussed are broader societal impacts of the program, such as greater accessibility in rural areas, and the influence of AgrAbility in the international rehabilitation community.

The 20-year summary is available in accessible PDF format in the Latest News section at www.agrability.org. For a printed copy, call 800-825-4264 or email agrability@agrability.org.

New version of video available

AgrAbility is moving forward with promotion and distribution of its new video, *AgrAbility: It's About Hope*. A DVD copy has already been sent to every county Extension office in the country, with distribution to every FFA chapter in the U.S. scheduled for this fall. In addition, since this 20-minute video may be too long for some venues, a shortened version of just over 5 minutes has been produced and posted on the AgrAbility YouTube channel www.YouTube.com/user/NationalAgrAbility.



The Toolbox is now online

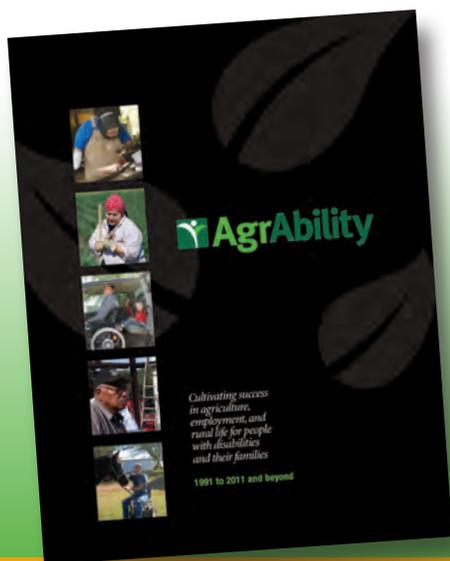
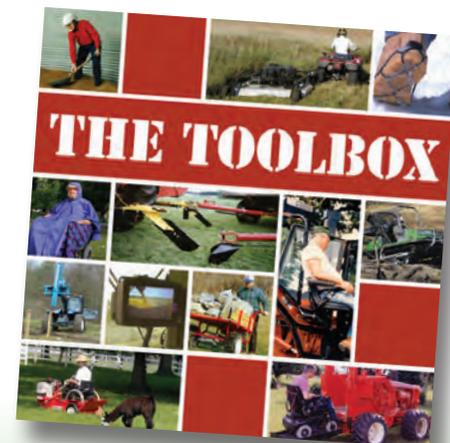
One of AgrAbility's most significant resources is *Agricultural Tools, Equipment, and Buildings for Farmers and Ranchers with Physical Disabilities*. Commonly known as *The Toolbox*, this resource has exposed tens of thousands of farmers, ranchers, professionals, and students to hundreds of assistive technology solutions that can assist those with disabilities who are engaged in agriculture-related activities.

Since first published by the Breaking New Ground Resource Center at Purdue University in 1986 (predating by several years the creation of AgrAbility at the federal level), there have been three print editions and three CD versions of *The Toolbox*. Now, this important resource is available online at www.agrability.org/toolbox.

This new format leverages the inherent advantages of the Web, such as worldwide access to anyone having a computer and Internet connection, plus the ability to edit, update, and add new solutions to the resource much more easily than was possible with the print and CD versions.

The online Toolbox has an advanced search function and an "Explore" feature (similar to a table of contents) for easy location of solutions. New features include the ability to identify "favorite" solutions, compile these products into a reusable "favorites album" file, and then print such solutions (and albums) in PDF format. The entire resource was designed from the ground up with accessibility in mind and is completely Section 508 compliant for usability for the blind and visually impaired.

Like previous editions, each solution includes a description, supplier listing, photo (in cases where one or more are available), and video clips for certain products. An online "help" function assists users with the main features of the site.





Partner Updates

This issue's Partner Updates focuses on two important entities that function behind the scenes to support AgrAbility's mission: the NAP Evaluation Team, headquartered at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, and the AgrAbility Advisory Team. Together, these groups provide objective feedback about the NAP's activities and form the core of the Project's accountability component.

University of Illinois Evaluation Team

It is important that AgrAbility evaluate the usefulness of its activities, especially since the program is supported by taxpayer funding through the USDA. Effective evaluation is critical to guide the overall project direction, to assess resource materials and services, to determine progress on accomplishing project objectives, to provide feedback on improving specified activities, and to establish a framework for addressing particular challenges. Therefore, the NAP has subcontracted with evaluation specialists, led by Professor Robert Aherin and Dr. Robert Petrea, at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Some of their main objectives are to:

- Conduct an annual needs assessment involving State and Regional AgrAbility Project (SRAP) staffs. These surveys give the NAP feedback on such things as its responsiveness to state and regional AgrAbility Project (SRAP) assistance requests, publications and other resources, and ideas for future initiatives.
- Carry out an evaluation of each annual AgrAbility National Training Workshop. Feedback is provided for the conference as a whole, for every breakout session, and for the offsite tours.
- Complete an annual summary of AgrAbility customer demographic data. These reports quantify basic statistics – such as age, disability type, farming operation – for AgrAbility customers served by the SRAPs.

In addition, the evaluation team works with the AgrAbility Evaluation Committee, chaired by Dr. Robert Fetsch of Colorado State University, to develop a practical, resource-effective impact measurement system that can be used consistently by all SRAPs. Some of the committees' initial reports¹ show that:

- 86% of AgrAbility clients were able to complete chores more successfully
- 84% were able to manage their farm or ranch more successfully
- 73% were able to operate their machinery more successfully
- 81% were able to better access workspaces

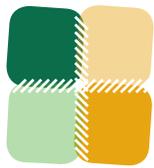
AgrAbility Advisory Team

Comprised of professionals from agriculture, rehabilitation-related organizations, and current or former AgrAbility clients, the AgrAbility Advisory Team contributes to short- and long-range strategic planning. Meeting face-to-face annually and participating in conference calls as needed during the year, the team reviews AgrAbility resources and gives feedback on work plan goals and progress. Of particular value to the program is the networking capacity members bring via their connections throughout the agriculture, legislative, and rehabilitation communities. Current members of the AgrAbility Advisory Team include:

- Billy Altom** – Executive Director, Associated Programs of Rural Independent Living Centers (APRIL), and past farmer
- Nell Bailey** – Executive Director, Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA)
- Carl Davis** – Supervisor of Appeals, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, American Legion
- Val Farmer** – Clinical psychologist serving a large farm case load and nationally syndicated author of a column on rural mental health issues
- Cory Frederick** – Registered occupational therapist and former dairy farmer
- Amy Lueking** – Registered occupational therapist with a farm background
- Michael O'Gorman** – Executive Director, Farmer Veteran Coalition
- Kent Schescke** – Director of Strategic Partnerships, National FFA Organization
- Don Skinner** – Farmer with a disability, Easter Seals board member
- George Vernon** – Rural attorney and horse breeder
- Hubert Von Holten and Kathy Smith** – Co-owners of Life Essentials, designers and fabricators of assistive technology
- Gerald Weisman** – Rehabilitation Engineer, President of RESNA



¹ Fetsch, R. J., Schuler, R., Beck, M., Simmons, S., Ballin, K., Aherin, R., Little, T., & Luke, V. (2009, October 6). Evaluating the impacts of direct client services: A four-state report with the McGill Quality of Life Tool. Presented at the National AgrAbility Training Workshop, Grand Rapids, MI.



Arrivals and departures

Welcome to William Corbin Wolfe, son of Amber Wolfe, AgrAbility Project Coordinator for the Arthritis Foundation, and husband David. William was born on June 16.

AgrAbility bids farewell to Emily Morehouse, AgrAbility's Program Specialist at the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.



Emily Morehouse

Having worked three year with USDA and AgrAbility, Emily is heading back to her home state of Illinois to serve as program coordinator for the Center for Nanoscale Science and Technology in the University of Illinois' College of Engineering Micro and Nanotechnology Lab.



Amber, David and William Wolfe

NAP wins awards

The National AgrAbility Project's www.agrability.org was recognized for excellence in website accessibility with a Purdue Web Accessibility Award. The university initiated the awards this year as a way to recognize university entities that have made significant strides in meeting or exceeding the university's standards for accessible Web design while demonstrating excellence in design and communication.

In addition, the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) awarded three AgrAbility resources Blue Ribbon Awards in the 2011 ASABE Educational Aids Competition. They are: *AgrAbility Harvest* newsletter in the "Publications, Short" category; *AgrAbility: It's About Hope* DVD in the "Electronic Delivery" category; and *¿Podrá ser la Artritis lo que me causa Dolor? (Could Arthritis be what is Causing My Pain?)* Spanish-language fotonovela in the "Publications, Long" category.

AgrAbility farm media campaign

Look for AgrAbility in some of your favorite farm and ranch magazines during the coming months. The Project is expanding its public awareness efforts through an ad campaign that seeks to expose tens of thousands of readers to the AgrAbility mission. Ads are currently being run in *American Cattlemen*, *American Dairyman*, and *Horde's Dairyman*, with negotiations underway for them to appear in *The Progressive Farmer* and *Successful Farming*.

National Training Workshop

Thank you to all the presenters, sponsors, and participants who made the 2011 AgrAbility NTW a success! This year's conference, held in Indianapolis on November 7-10, had a record-setting attendance of approximately 230. Preliminary feedback from the participants indicates a high satisfaction level with the quality of the presentations. PowerPoints from the sessions are slated to be posted on the NAP website soon.

Thirty-four farmers and caregivers, including five veterans, received scholarships to attend.

Field travels far afield

Dr. Bill Field, Project Director for the National AgrAbility Project, had the unusual opportunity to participate in farm safety conferences in Sweden, Austria, Italy, and Ireland during the past nine months. In addition to touring numerous agricultural enterprises and networking with international experts in agriculture, Dr. Field presented sessions on various topics, including disability in agriculture. He noted that many health and safety professionals expressed surprise at the concept of returning farmers with disabilities to work, as they assumed that such individuals would be at high risk of secondary injury and should simply be cared for by state disability services. These trips have resulted in follow-up discussions, participation from Sweden at the AgrAbility National Training Workshop, and orders for two American-made tractor lifts.



AgrAbility Harvest

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ON THE HORIZON

AgrAbility continues to reach out to diverse audiences, such as migrant and seasonal farmworkers, through participation in such events as the **Western Migrant Stream Forum**. Also, if you're an OT attending the **AOTA Conference** in Indianapolis, look for the AgrAbility display featuring the Project's accessible tractor.



2012

January 25-28	Assistive Technology Industry Association 2012	Orlando, FL	www.atia.org
February 15-17	21st Annual Western Migrant Stream Forum	Portland, OR	www.nwrpca.org/conferences/western-migrant-stream-forum
February 15-18	National Farm Machinery Show	Louisville, KY	www.farmmachineryshow.org
February 27- March 3	27th Annual International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference	San Diego, CA	www.csun.edu/cod/conference
March 2-3	Mid-South Farm & Gin Show	Memphis, TN	www.southerncottonginners.org
April 26-29	AOTA Annual Conference and Expo	Indianapolis, IN	www.aota.org