

AgrAbility Harvest

An ingathering of
helpful information
on disability in
agriculture

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Community can be defined as, “a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society.”¹ In many ways, that’s an apt description of AgrAbility. Though the AgrAbility family is scattered over more than 25 states from California to Maine, we share the common bond of our mission, which inspires us to find ways to encourage one another and share expertise that will make all of us more effective.

One of the key ways that AgrAbility builds community is through the annual National Training Workshop (NTW). This four-day event provides the opportunity to gain valuable technical knowledge, make important networking contacts, and learn about new technologies from vendors. But it’s also a kind of family reunion where we can catch up with old friends, make new ones, and laugh a little (or a lot, in some cases).

The 2011 NTW was especially significant because it marked the 20th anniversary of AgrAbility. It was also the largest-ever, with approximately 230 attending, including 33 farmer/rancher scholarship recipients. New features were added, including a “mini-track” on veterans’ issues and expanded pre-conference activities.

While the NTW is important, it is definitely not the only way that AgrAbility builds community. Our email listserv is kept busy, often being used by staff members across the country to describe unique client issues and solicit possible solutions. Quarterly all-staff teleconferences also help the diverse AgrAbility projects unite for a time of sharing and learning from guest presenters.

Even if you’re not an AgrAbility staff member, you can still join our community. Six different AgrAbility Communities of Interest hold monthly or bimonthly teleconferences, open to all, concerning arthritis, assistive technology, ergonomics, mental/behavioral health, peer support, and vocational rehabilitation. For information about participating, see www.agrability.org/COI.

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

A Closer Look



Three newest AgrAbility states add tremendous diversity to the program

Rice, wild blueberries, timber, cotton, tobacco. Broilers, brown eggs, hogs, catfish. Mountains, plains, plateaus, coastlines, and river deltas. If you haven't deciphered these clues, you might try looking for the three new AgrAbility state projects in Arkansas, Maine, and North Carolina.

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Arkansas

Joining the program in 2010, Arkansas AgrAbility serves a state that has more than 49,000 farms and an agricultural economy that accounts for about one in six jobs throughout the state. In case you thought rice comes only from the Far East, you may be surprised to learn that the U.S. is one of the top five exporters, with approximately 48% of all U.S. total rice production coming from Arkansas. In total, the state ranks in the top ten in ten different commodities, including catfish, cotton, sweet potatoes, and turkeys.

Functioning as a partnership between the University of Arkansas Extension, the Arthritis Foundation Southeast Region, and ICAN (the state Assistive Technology Act project), Arkansas AgrAbility has special programs related to such areas as noise-induced hearing loss and adaptive gardening. To assist with outreach concerning the application of universal design to homes and agricultural worksites, the project has a universal design bathroom built in a 16-foot cargo trailer that travels to events around the state. The Arkansas team is also developing a lower back injury prevention program that will include exercises specific to strengthening the lower back and core stability. This should be especially helpful, as back injuries are the most common disabling health condition reported by AgrAbility clients.



Dr. LaVona Traywick talks with Arkansas consumers about preserving healthy hearing

Maine

Maine's 8000 farms are generally small and diversified. In contrast to some other AgrAbility states, large-scale commodity agriculture is not the norm in Maine, except for potato production in Aroostock County, which helps raise the state to eighth nationally in that crop. Maine is also 1st nationally in wild blueberries and brown eggs, second in maple syrup, and second in New England in milk and livestock production.

Established in 2010, Maine AgrAbility unites the University of Maine Cooperative Extension with Goodwill Industries of Northern New England and Alpha One center for independent living. Each partner brings unique strengths, such as the university's agricultural expertise, Alpha One's occupational therapists, and Goodwill's networking relationships with such groups as vocational rehabilitation services (VR).

To date, the project has worked with clients such as a blind farmer with a market garden, a farm family with a child having epilepsy and autism, and farmers with sciatica, multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia, Bell's palsy, and/or arthritis. One notable success story was a woman with multiple sclerosis who had been a wheelchair user for 25 years but had never been able to afford a wheelchair-accessible van. Through networking, Maine AgrAbility was able to help her obtain a low-interest adaptive equipment loan for the van, and VR paid for the modifications.

North Carolina

The theme of diversity is clearly applicable to North Carolina, the newest AgrAbility project, which joined the team in 2011. The state's strong agricultural base includes some 52,000 farms, 60,000 migrant/seasonal farmworkers, and more than 85 different agricultural commodities. The state's varied geography – mountains, plains, and coastline – contribute to North Carolina's first or second national rankings in nine commodities, including tobacco, sweet potatoes, poultry and eggs, hogs and pigs, and Christmas trees.

The North Carolina AgrAbility Project is also a diverse crew. Led by North Carolina A&T State University (the first 1890 land-grant university to host an AgrAbility Project), the team of partners includes the North Carolina Agromedicine Institute, Eastern Carolina University (ECU) College of Allied Health Sciences, North Carolina State University, and the North Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council.

In addition to working with traditional clients, North Carolina AgrAbility will have the advantage of some unique service opportunities. As the home of several internationally recognized medical institutions, including the NC Agromedicine Institute and ECU College of Allied Health Sciences, the project will be providing education and awareness opportunities to medical professionals and students. Also, because of the state's large military and veteran populations, the project is making efforts to build relationships with veterans' organizations to provide assistance to veterans with disabilities working in agriculture.

Affiliate projects

Currently there is not enough USDA funding for every state to have an AgrAbility project. Therefore, as new states are funded, some existing projects typically lose theirs. Often, those latter states continue with at least some AgrAbility-related services funded through non-USDA sources, thus becoming "AgrAbility affiliate projects."

The National AgrAbility Project thanks the AgrAbility teams from Michigan and Pennsylvania for their years of USDA service, as they recently became affiliate projects. They join existing affiliates in Idaho, Illinois, and Iowa. There's always opportunity for renewed funding in the next round of grants.

For more information on these or any other AgrAbility Projects, see www.agrability.org/contact-lists.



Weather - one of the challenges of farming in Maine



Christopher Voorhees is one of the first to benefit from North Carolina AgrAbility

Vegetable Production

Vegetable production can range from the smallest backyard garden to the largest commercial operation. All are covered in the new Vegetable Crops section of The Toolbox Assistive Technology Database Online at www.agrability.org/toolbox. Here is a sample of the range of solutions in The Toolbox that can help grow veggies with less strain and effort.



With two people and a 40-hp tractor, the **Pixall Green Bean Harvester** can harvest dozens of cases of beans per hour, with minimal field loss and bean damage. Accommodating row-widths up to 18 inches, the machine cuts off the plants at ground-level and draws them up into a picking reel where the beans are ‘combed’ from the plants, cleaned of leaves and field debris, then conveyed to a rear platform for bagging or boxing. Visit www.oxbocorp.com.



Made in Italy, the **Self-Propelled Single-Row Vacuum Planter** is a walk-behind or utility vehicle-pulled seeder designed for limited acreages. It features a 4 hp engine, six-ratio gear box, row marker, changeable seed discs (to vacuum-plant any size seeds), seed-drain funnel, 5-liter hopper, four-height adjustable colter, double drive wheel, and grid wheel to close the furrow. Visit www.marketfarm.com.



The **Hatfield Transplanter** lets one transplant single seedlings, tubers, bulbs, etc. from a standing position. It's operated as follows: (a) holding the handles apart, plunge it into the ground (or through plastic mulch) to the depth-stop; (b) push handles together to open a hole; (c) drop in the transplant; then (d) lift the tool straight up, allowing the soil to collapse around the plant or cover the tuber/bulb. Visit www.johnnyseeds.com.

Photo provided by Aspire Farm Indiana



Plans with DVD instructions are available for three **Small-Scale Hydroponic Gardening Systems**: (a) the Lettuce Run for growing lettuce, greens, and herbs, (b) the Vertical Garden for strawberries, lettuce, herbs, flowers, and other plants, and (c) the Self-Watering Garden for all type of vegetables and ground fruits. Visit www.easiestgarden.com.

* The authors assume no liability in connection with any use of the products discussed and make no warranty (expressed or implied) in that respect. References to products are not intended as endorsements to the exclusion of others that may be similar.



Russell talking with consumer at farm show



Ramsey and wife Wanda

Remembering *Russell Ramsey*

Sometimes you don't recognize the last time you'll see someone. Russell Ramsey, Missouri AgrAbility team member, and his wife Wanda joined with the AgrAbility family for the NTW in November, but Russell was gone just a few weeks later. Missouri AgrAbility staff and friends contributed the following:

Our dear friend Russell Ramsey passed away suddenly, December 10, 2011. During 10 years with Missouri AgrAbility, Russell gave his time and spirit generously to both co-workers and clients. Russell approached every task with compassion, humility, and a desire to make a positive difference in the lives of those he touched.

A U.S. Army veteran, Russell received B.S. and M.S. degrees in ag-related areas from the University of Missouri. He served as a county executive director for FSA and taught vocational agriculture at three schools

before retiring. He then served as an Extension farm business specialist for seven years. As a regional coordinator for the Lincoln University Small Farm Family Program, Russell was instrumental in integrating AgrAbility into programming for underserved populations. Along with all this, he raised beef cattle for more than 30 years.

In 2007, Russell had a farm accident resulting in a serious traumatic brain injury. After many months of hospitalization, rehabilitation, and support from Wanda, his family, and community, Russell was able to return to work. Even in the early stages of his recovery, Russell expressed a desire to return to AgrAbility activities, later volunteering to develop and publish a resource list of clients willing to serve as peer counselors. Russell attributed the success of his recovery largely to God, his wife, positive thinking, and goal setting.

Missouri AgrAbility can never replace the support and friendship Russell brought to our project, but we have permanently benefitted from the example he set in working productively and positively to achieve good outcomes for our clients.

Willard Downs, longtime project leader for Missouri AgrAbility, stated, "Russell was one of the most helpful, unassuming people I have had the pleasure to know. He always had time to help those served by the project and spent many hours as a volunteer for Missouri AgrAbility." Fellow AgrAbility staff member Jackie Allenbrand added, "He was a quiet man and he knew his stuff, so when he spoke, I listened. He had survived a farm accident himself and knew what farmers go through to fight their way back to being able to work on the farm. I consider myself lucky to have worked with a man like Russell, and he will be greatly missed."

"He was a quiet man and he knew his stuff, so when he spoke, I listened."



Partner Updates



Amber Wolfe at APTA Convention

Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation's AgrAbility Project Coordinator, Amber Wolfe, recently represented the project at several events around the country. November found Amber speaking at the North Dakota State University's Extension Educators' conference in Fargo and the American Agri-Women convention in Wichita, Kansas. In December, she presented a session on arthritis and agriculture at the Illinois Farm Bureau convention in Chicago.

Continuing AgrAbility's national outreach to FFA students and advisers, Amber helped facilitate the mailing of the *AgrAbility: It's About Hope* DVD to every FFA chapter in the U.S. She also represented the project at the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) conference in Chicago, an event that boasted more than 12,000 participants and provided a great venue for increasing awareness of AgrAbility's services.

Amber's schedule continues to be busy for the next several months, as she is scheduled to speak at the National Women in Agriculture Educators conference in Tennessee and conduct arthritis and agriculture workshops in Alabama, Nebraska, and Montana.

The Arthritis Foundation is also developing new resources related to agriculture, including a poster, the "ABCs of Arthritis." Amber is working on an arthritis and agriculture curriculum designed to assist educators, such as Extension agents and FFA advisers. This five-lesson set is slated to include sessions on understanding arthritis, prevention of arthritis in rural youth, lifestyle management and pain control, implications of arthritis on the farm, and resources for managing arthritis.



Goodwill Industries International

Goodwill is facilitating the workshop, "AgrAbility – Creating Opportunities for Veterans & Other Agriculture Workers with Disabilities," on May 15-17, 2012 in Rochester, New York. This event will feature information about the tools and resources available to support veterans and others with disabilities as they pursue careers in agriculture. A panel of farmer veterans with disabilities will discuss their transition from active duty to rural agriculture life. Other sessions will focus on conducting on-farm assessments through both classroom instruction and a tour of a local dairy farm. Participants will develop assessment reports that can serve as valuable tools for working with vocational rehabilitation counselors in the Veterans Administration or state VR programs. The Farmer Veteran Coalition will also present a session on their organization's national engagement with veterans pursuing farming.

Seth Turner, Goodwill's director of public policy, will present the keynote address discussing the organization's white paper, *From Deployment to Employment: Goodwill's Call to Action on Supporting Military Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families*. Also on the workshop agenda is a tour of the Goodwill of the Finger Lakes, including its specialized vision center, featuring a 211 Call Center that provides national veterans' crisis services, as well as a state-of-the-art vision rehabilitation assistive technology center.

To register, check the "Latest News" link on the www.agrability.org homepage. The conference hotel, Holiday Inn Rochester Airport, is offering a conference rate of \$89 per night.

Other recent activities for Goodwill's AgrAbility Coordinator, Eric Olson, include facilitation of stakeholder meetings to explore AgrAbility-related services in the currently unfunded states of Arizona and Alabama. Eric also represented AgrAbility and staffed an exhibit at the Western Migrant Stream Forum in Portland, Oregon.



AgrAbility included in President's budget

AgrAbility recently achieved a major milestone by being included, for the first time, in a President's budget to Congress. While the program has been authorized under the Farm Bill since 1990, it has never been recommended for appropriations by a President. In the past, appropriations for AgrAbility have been initiated though the actions of senators or representatives.

We are thankful for the support the program has received from its partners, clients, and others who have consistently raised the awareness of public officials to the needs of agricultural workers with disabilities. It is also believed that the Disability in Agriculture and Rural Life Conference, organized by Goodwill Industries International and held in Washington, D.C., last September, played a significant role in educating key officials about AgrAbility.



HEAR-on-the-Farm study

The University of Michigan is conducting HEAR on the Farm, an on-line study to test the effectiveness of various programs that encourage farmers to protect their hearing. Farmers may participate by going to www.hearonthefarm.org and entering the access code **saveears**. They can also earn up to \$40 for participating.

Many farmers experience hearing loss due to exposure to loud noises in the workplace. Besides resulting in problems related with communication, hearing loss has also been associated with tinnitus (ringing in the ears), social isolation, low self-esteem, and depression.

The survey asks a series of questions about farmers' use of hearing protection and their attitudes and beliefs about noise and hearing. They are then directed to one of three intervention options and are polled with a series of questions again after 6 and 12 months.

This study is an excellent opportunity to provide a valuable service to farmers and contribute to the development of a program to improve the health and safety of farmers.

BNG Achievement Awards given

The AgrAbility staff at Purdue recently awarded the Breaking New Ground Achievement Award to these five individuals who have made major contributions to lives of farm families that have been impacted by disabilities:

- Bob Fetsch, project director of Colorado AgrAbility,
- Linda Jaco, co-director of Oklahoma AgrAbility,
- Dawn Minns, freelance graphic designer for many AgrAbility products, and
- Emily Morehouse, former program specialist for USDA/NIFA.

The National AgrAbility Project congratulates these recipients and looks forward to their continued contributions to American agriculture and society.



Mental Health First Aid available

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a public education program that helps people identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance-use disorders. MHFA is offered in the form of an interactive 12-hour course that presents an overview of mental illness and substance-use disorders in the U.S.

Dr. Roberta Schweitzer, Indiana AgrAbility consultant and assistant professor of nursing at Purdue, is joining with Indiana AgrAbility partner Hoosier Uplands to conduct a class in southern Indiana. She is also available to go elsewhere in the U.S. to offer MHFA.

For more information, contact agrability@agrability.org.



AgrAbility Harvest

Breaking New Ground Resource Center
Purdue University
ABE Building
225 South University St.
West Lafayette, IN 47907

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Purdue University is an equal access/equal opportunity institution.

ON THE HORIZON

Join AgrAbility for the workshop
**AgrAbility – Creating Opportunities for Veterans
& other Agriculture Workers with Disabilities**
on May 15-17, 2012 in Rochester, New York.
See page 6 or www.agrability.org for more details.



Courtesy of Paul Van Hoy,
Fotoimpressions,
and VisitRochester.com

2012

April 26-29	AOTA Annual Conference and Expo	Indianapolis, IN	www.aota.org
June 6-8	World Pork Expo	Des Moines, IA	www.worldpork.org
June 24-28	International Society for Agricultural Safety & Health (ISASH) Annual Conference	Burlington, VT	www.nifsagsafety.org
June 28-July 3	RESNA Annual Conference	Baltimore, MD	www.resna.org
July 29-August 1	ASABE Annual International Meeting	Dallas, TX	www.asabemeetings.org
August 28-30	Farm Progress Show	Boone, IA	www.farmprogressshow.com
September 11-13	Husker Harvest Days	Grand Island, NE	www.huskerharvestdays.com
October 2-6	World Dairy Expo	Madison, WI	www.world-dairy-expo.com
October 5-8	APRIL Annual Conference	Reno, NV	www.april-rural.org
October 16-18	Sunbelt Ag Expo	Moultrie, GA	www.sunbeltexpo.com
October 24-27	National FFA Convention	Indianapolis, IN	www.ffa.org/convention



800-825-4264
www.agrability.org