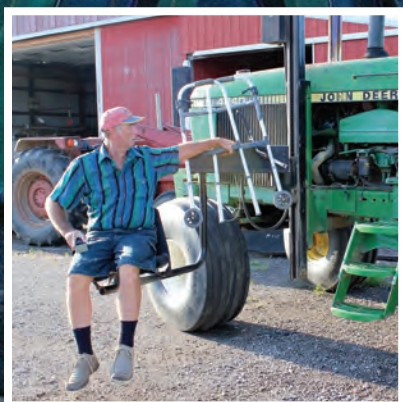


# Determination *in Motion*

By Katie Maupin





“He always had this persistent attitude and was determined to prove the doctors wrong ever since they told him he probably wouldn’t walk. I remember the day they told him he wouldn’t have much of a chance of getting out of his wheelchair, he just said, ‘I’m going to prove them wrong.’” — Whitney Hosier

Starting a sentence with, “Well, if you want to ...,” will likely get a smirk or an eye-roll from Mark Hosier’s two daughters. They know it will always end with a farm chore or an odd job around the house. And unlike the rest of the world, in the Hosier household, “if you want to” really means, “I expect it to be done.” Hosier laughs when he recalls just how aggravated his daughters would get when he suggested chores in that fashion.

“He always kind of made it sound like an option,” his youngest daughter, Whitney Hosier, recalls. “But it was really a hint.”

But in March of 2006, it seemed that Mark Hosier of Alexandria, Ind., was out of options. While feeding a 2,000-pound round bale to his cattle, it rolled off the forks of the tractor and on top of him, crushing his 11th and 12th thoracic vertebrae and paralyzing him from the waist down.

After a month in the hospital, doctors didn’t give him the option to walk again. In fact, they told him to get used to his wheelchair because he’d spend the rest of his life there. But like most farmers, Hosier is strong willed and big hearted. He told himself, “Well, if I want to I can walk again.” He knew it wasn’t an option, hint or suggestion — it was his expectation.

Prior to his world literally crashing down, Hosier farmed 500 acres of corn and beans, ran cattle, and raised a few hogs on his family farm where he watched his daughters grow up in the same house where he was raised. It was his daughters who got him started in the purebred pig business.

### Friends, family and showpigs

Hosier was watching the county fair hog show with his eldest daughter, now Kylie Hendress, after she exhibited her calf at the fair as a first-time 4-Her. Suddenly, the then 10-year-old Kylie looked up at him and said, “I think I want to show pigs next year.”

Hosier was surprised because he hadn’t thought about his daughter showing pigs, even though he had shown a couple as 4-H projects himself when he was young, and owned some commercial hogs until the ’80s. Soon Hosier found himself in the showpig business — first buying a couple of gilts, then selling them back at the end of the year, until someone suggested he farrow them himself. Thus Mark Hosier & Family Showpigs was born.

Kylie and Whitney helped him with every aspect of the operation from processing pigs to picking replacements. The only thing they couldn’t help Hosier with was picking a single breed to specialize in.

“Kylie really liked Landrace,” Hosier says. “Then ‘Whit’ started showing and we had to raise Spots.”

Together the family improved their pigs.

“When we first started, we were at the bottom of the pack, but by the time they were done, we were winning champions,” Hosier says. The last year Whitney showed, they hauled six pigs and none of them placed less than first in their class.

“I guarantee these girls worked hard,” Hosier says. “It made them showmen.”

It also made them invaluable help after his accident. Since Hosier had no use of his legs, assisting with farrowing was a problem. If he had to pull a pig, Hosier had to be helped into the farrowing house, sit behind the sow to assist, and then helped back into his chair. Luckily, Whitney was home from college at Black Hawk College, Kewanee, Ill., for the first round of farrowing after the accident, and Kylie lived close enough, in Indianapolis, to assist during the second. Countless industry friends were also willing to lend a helping hand.

“The showpig industry — all the people we ran the showpig circuit with — are good friends. They are the ones we heard from first,” Hosier says about the days following his accident. “They supported us and took up collections to help with

**Previous page:** Mark Hosier and his wife, Dena. Photo insets: (Left) Hosier has adapted his tractor so that he may be lifted into the driver’s seat, but he is sure to bring along his walker in case he needs to make some on-the-spot repairs. (Middle) Hosier processes a litter of pigs in a wheelchair-accessible farrowing house he built after his accident. (Right) Hosier drives one of his keeper gilts that he raised this spring.

**This page:** Youngest daughter, Whitney, drives one of their Landrace gilts. Raising showpigs has been a family hobby for the Hosiers since daughter Kylie said she wanted to show pigs more than a decade ago.



the added expense, because you have so much added expense when you're in an accident like this."

All of the Hosiers' friends, family and church members banded together to help in any way they could. Their feed dealer even built a special deck leading to the front door of the Hosier residence that was wheelchair accessible so Hosier could come home from the hospital for the first time on Easter Sunday.

## Healing and harvesting

After his accident, Hosier knew he wanted to do two things: continue farming and be able to do so on his own. To him, just driving a tractor around a field or just looking at his pigs was not farming – a farmer was involved with every part of the work, which includes fixing equipment and pulling pigs.

Hosier sold most of his cattle because he recognized the type of management they required would be too hard for him to do by himself after his accident, but he held onto his showpigs and most of his row crops. Immediately, he began thinking of ways to make it work.

At first, he struggled through muddy barn lots and narrow halls to take care of his pigs in a wheelchair that was designed for use indoors.

"He used to get his chair stuck in the barn and call up to the house and say, 'Can you come and get me out?'" his wife, Dena Hosier, recalls.

Hosier even used to have his dad, Howard Hosier of Anderson, Ind., lift his wheelchair up in the bucket of a tractor so he could climb into the combine. Then he learned about AgrAbility, an organization that specializes in helping producers who are disabled continue to farm (see sidebar). With their help and a lot of creativity, innovation and hard work, Hosier can now care for his showpigs and crops almost entirely by himself.

Today, Hosier can walk with a walker after three years of therapy, including therapeutic horseback riding. His wife still recalls the moment he saw the first step of progress on his long road to recovery.



Mark Hosier's family helped on his road to recovery. He says he can't thank them enough. (Above) The Hosier family gathers for the wedding of oldest daughter, Kylie, to Nick Hendress. Pictured left to right are Mark and Dena Hosier, Kylie and Nick Hendress, and Whitney Hosier. (Right) Hosier pets his loyal dog, Tess. He says animals helped him heal, from the horses he rode in therapeutic riding, to his showpigs he now cares for almost entirely on his own.



"I was out planting flowers on the porch and he started yelling for me to 'come here, come here,'" she says. She ran inside, only to see that Hosier could finally move his toes three months after his accident.

After going through something as life changing as what they have endured, the Hosier family appreciates the little things – the small steps.

"People don't realize what they take for granted with walking," Hosier says. "I actually kid you not, when I started walking again I had to concentrate. I couldn't walk and talk. You know people think it's funny, but I had to retrain myself."

So step-by-step, Mark Hosier began to walk and also make the improvements to his facilities that would allow him to take care of his hogs entirely by himself.

He moved his sows into a lofty barn connected to a lot with gestation stalls in the middle. Each day, he takes his new, outdoor wheelchair out to feed the sows. He attaches a feed bucket to it using welded holders he invented himself. He divvies up feed in the stalls before pulling a release on the gate to the barn. The sows push the gate open, and then each one walks into a crate to eat her

meal. After they eat, Hosier drives them back to their pen in the barn.

In 2009, Hosier built a new farrowing house. The aisles are 4 and 5 feet wide so he can easily enter and turn around in his wheelchair. Most uniquely, the stalls are raised one foot off the ground so Hosier can assist any sow or gilt having trouble pigging, from his wheelchair. For people wondering how the sows get into the stalls, Hosier says they just step right up into them. A camera streams live video of the sows into the house so he can keep an eye on them without having to make the trek to the barn.

Hosier also improved the weaning/show barn. He made the aisles wide enough for a wheelchair, added an overhead door, according to AgrAbility's suggestion, and specially designed pens with gates that open all the way across the aisle so the pigs are never loose when he sorts them.

Last but not least, AgrAbility helped him attach lifts to his equipment. Now, Hosier can be safely lifted into the driver's seat of his tractor to head to the field. But he is sure to bring his walker in case he needs to stop and make any on-the-spot repairs.

## Looking ahead

Hosier now has around 10 purebred sows of various breeds (they never could decide on just one) all named after the places they were purchased from or their lineage. Each year he raises about 100 showpigs to sell. One of the biggest changes for Hosier is he no longer sells showpigs directly off his farm. Today he is part of the Hoosier Elite Showpig Sale with Terry Shaffer of Shaffer's Gold Rush in Albany, Ind.; JJ Genetics of Warren, Ind.; Don Rodeffer & Family of Selmer, Ind.; Jeff Jarrell of Alexandria, Ind.; Jeremy Scott of North Webster, Ind.; and Lee Hendricks & Family of Elwood, Ind.

With the addition of his new farrowing house, Hosier is trying his luck at raising barrows farrowed in July to send south, and is already making plans for the litters he expects next January.

He still has little changes that he would like to make to his operation – finish remodeling the other half of the show barn and switch out a gate where he keeps the sows – but he knows his operation wouldn't be where it is today without the love and support of his family.

Hosier beams with pride as he talks about how hard his daughters worked and how well his wife cared for him through the entire ordeal. Absentmindedly petting his loyal dog, Tess, Hosier also talks about the healing powers of animals. In some ways it was the pigs, he says that kept him going, kept him getting out of bed, and kept him working to be able to care for them himself.

"Even pigs are good to help you mend," Hosier says.

**DIGILINK**

**You Tube**

See Mark Hosier in action as he demonstrates the daily work of a farm and showpig operation – conducted mostly from a motorized scooter.



Use your smartphone to visit our YouTube channel or type in the web address below.

<http://qrs.ly/s93jbhb>

## AgrAbility has been helping producers like Hosier continue to farm for two decades.

AgrAbility is a program sponsored by the USDA that assists farmers impacted by disabilities. It consists of a national project as well as 21 state and regional projects, each involving collaborative partnerships between land-grant universities and various nonprofit disability service organizations.

Farming has one of the highest disabling injury rates of any industry, and it is estimated 19 percent of active farmers can no longer perform some essential tasks due to a disability. Not all injuries are as sudden or as instantly life-altering as Hosier's, but they can still have a huge affect on day-to-day operations. Arthritis is the most common ailment that AgrAbility assists producers overcome, and they work closely with the Arthritis Foundation, Heartland Region to find solutions. Other disabilities that AgrAbility helps producers through include: spinal cord injuries, back injuries, stroke, respiratory impairments, amputation, visual impairments, hearing impairments, head injuries and disabilities due to disease.

AgrAbility provides many resources to producers such as informational materials, education and training opportunities, referrals to other service providers and arranging peer support. They also perform on-site visits and training to recommend modifications to equipment and other new ways to help make everyday tasks easier.



Hosier's eldest daughter, Kylie Hendress, is currently the engagement coordinator for AgrAbility. She says watching AgrAbility assist her dad and her family not only instilled in her a compassion for others in similar situations, but directed her future career.

The Hosier family found out about AgrAbility and Stephen Swain, rural rehabilitation specialist, visited their farm and recommended different lifts and modifications that could be made to Hosier's equipment so he could be in the driver's seat by harvest that fall.

"It really helped him out knowing he could get back on the farm while he continued to do rehab and therapy," Hendress says.

Hosier is just one of the more than 11,000 estimated unique producers who have been assisted by AgrAbility over the last 20 years. Last year alone, 1,304 farmers were assisted by the program.

If AgrAbility can be of assistance to you, call their national toll-free hotline at 800.825.4264, or visit [www.agrability.org](http://www.agrability.org).

