



WORKING WITH FARM MEDIA

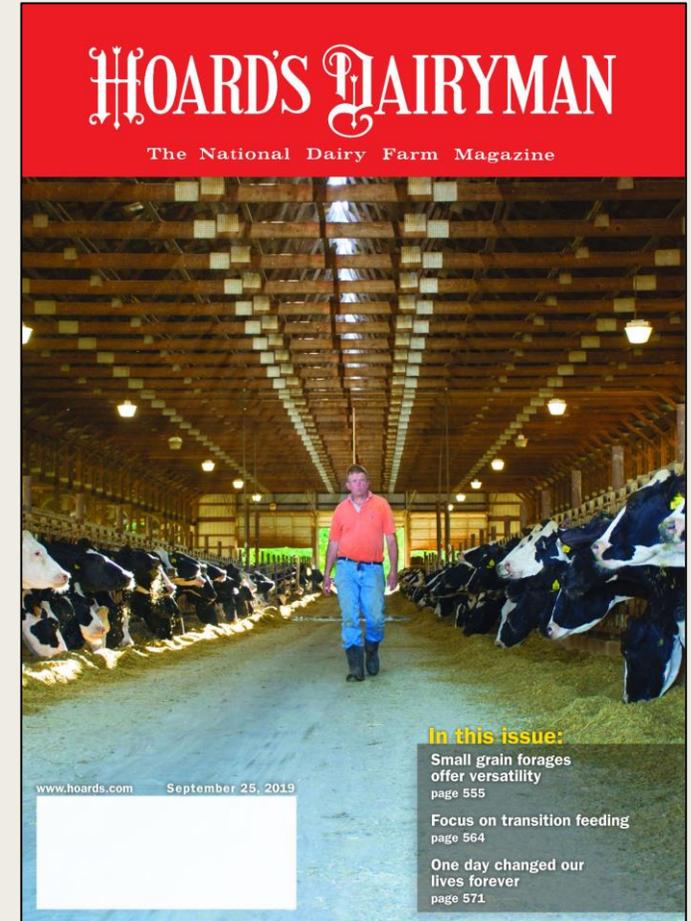
Maggie Gilles

Associate Editor, Hoard's Dairyman
Agrability National Training Workshop
March 25, 2020



What is Hoard's Dairyman?

- Founded in 1885
- An operational farm is also part of the company
 - *Milk 400 Guernsey and Jersey cows*
- National dairy publication
 - *More than 50,000 print subscribers*
 - *Online content as well*
 - Weekly e-newsletter: *Hoard's Dairyman Intel*
 - Social: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn
 - *International publication*
 - Spanish and Chinese editions
 - English version sent to additional countries



Shared mission

- Provide information to farmers
 - Market trends
 - Research
 - Farm stories
 - Help them do their job better
- Worked with AgrAbility over the years
 - Advertising
 - Print articles

Modifications kept him milking

by Kendra Martin

THE year was 1840: Martin Van Buren was president of the United States of America, Antarctica was discovered as a continent, and Philip Deans' — great-great-grandparents started a dairy farm in Lawrence County, Pa.

It may seem like a long time ago — and it was. But Philip thinks back to that year with a sense of pride and strong family tradition. "Farming is just a way of life for the Deans. We've been farming the same land for all of these years, it'd be a shame to see that change," he explained.

Philip began farming the 200-acre land full time with his father in 1982. He was in his 20s — and his dad was having heart problems and needed more help. Seven years later, Philip and his wife, Cindy, purchased the farm and have been living and working as full-time dairy farmers since. In addition to helping around the barn, Cindy handles the bookkeeping for Dean Farms.

But working in a dairy barn for more than 35 years has a way of taking a toll on one's body. A few years ago, Philip began to struggle with severe arthritis, shoulder pain, foot problems including hammer toe, and nodules in his lungs that caused pain when breathing in extreme temperature changes. He has also had two knee surgeries over the years.

Help is available

While talking with a friend at church one Sunday, she recommended that Philip contact AgrAbility PA. The woman was familiar with AgrAbility's services, as she had worked for the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), which is part of the state's Department of Labor and Industry. Both AgrAbility PA and OVR work collaboratively throughout the state to help farmers with a disability or health condition continue working in production agriculture.

Not long after that conversation, AgrAbility PA Project Assistant Abbie Spackman met Philip at his farm to conduct a farm evaluation and assessment. An occupational therapist and a farm coordinator from OVR also met with him. The team explored and discussed what types of assistive technology equipment and modifications could be made to his milking process. This consultation and development of formal recommendations are a free service to farmers in the state.

Changes were made

During the farm evaluation, they talked about different types of assistive technology that could help him keep farming. They identified the milking routine as one of the most important tasks to modify.

Recommendations in his flat barn milking parlor included covering

the gutters with grates and installing automatic takeoffs for milking. Automatic takeoffs release the milking unit from the udder of the cow when milking is complete. The unit is pulled up and away from the cow, greatly reducing repetitive motions. Thanks to funding support from OVR, these pieces are now in place and Philip can milk 10 cows at once — saving him time, as well as wear and tear on his body.

Other recommendations funded by OVR included a skid steer access platform and a utility vehicle. Philip uses the platform to enter and exit his skid steer safely without the need to climb and step on the front of the machine. It also has served as low scaffolding for doing jobs that require a lift around the farm.

The utility vehicle enables Philip to keep up with the logistics of moving cows from paddock to paddock, and also to pasture. The Deans use intensive rotational grazing. Philip has noticed a significant improvement in the grasses in the last 20 years. "And the cows seem happier, too," he added. They also take cows outside to the pasture during summer months. Philip is fortunate to have his grown son, Adam — a fifth generation Deans — involved on the farm and in its ownership. Adam has added a cheesemaking operation to the farm and sells the product in Pittsburgh-area farmers markets.

The joke among the family is that when Adam began working on the farm following high school, Cindy said, "I'm retiring." Retirement isn't in Philip's vocabulary yet, but the couple recently took a long overdue trip to Kentucky for a few days to celebrate their anniversary. It was the first time in 30 years that they had left the farm for more than two nights. Philip is very grateful for the equipment and modifications that



PHILIP DEANS IS DEALING WITH SEVERAL HEALTH ISSUES, BUT EQUIPMENT MODIFICATIONS HELP HIM TAKE CARE OF HIS MILKING PARI.

when Adam began working on the farm following high school, Cindy said, "I'm retiring." Retirement isn't in Philip's vocabulary yet, but the couple recently took a long overdue trip to Kentucky for a few days to celebrate their anniversary. It was the first time in 30 years that they had left the farm for more than two nights. Philip is very grateful for the equipment and modifications that

have allowed him to continue milking and working day in and day out around the farm. He describes AgrAbility PA and the OVR staff as the "push to make a lot of this a reality." Philip said, "It is great to have people come to the farm and see what we do. I only hope they know how much their support and generosity has meant to me and my family. It has meant everything."



FOR THE LEHMAN BROTHERS, AgrAbility PA's investment in custom-made powered milking units has taken them out of the busy dairy business.

Assistive technology: In and around the dairy barn

Each year, AgrAbility PA works with dairy farmers throughout the state to make recommendations on assistive technology devices that are available to help in and around the dairy barn. Some of these options include:

Rail system: This system acts as a carrier for the milking units in a tie stall barn and allows for the use of automatic takeoffs. With this system, the farmer does not have to carry or lift the milking units. Rather, they run on an overhead track from the milk house to the stalls where the cows are milked. The units can be easily attached to the milk pipeline and to the cow while the weight is still held by the rail. This system reduces the wear and tear on a farmer's back and shoulders.

Automatic takeoffs: With a rail system, automatic takeoffs can be installed to release the milking unit from the udder of the cow when it is done milking. The unit is pulled up and away from the cow, ready to be moved along the rail to the next cow, greatly reducing the amount of squatting and bending that is required to check the cow and remove the milking unit. Automatic takeoffs can eliminate at least 100 instances of squatting or bending per day and can help conserve joints. Even in a parlor setting, there are many reasons to install automatic takeoffs.

Gutter grates: Installing gutter grates may seem like a simple idea, but for farmers with mobility impairments, gutter grates can make a huge difference. Gutter grates cover the gutters that run behind the cows in a tie stall barn. The gutters can be difficult to step across; as such, they are a safety concern. The installation of gutter grates reduces the need to

step across the gutter, thereby preventing trips and falls. Meanwhile, grates still allow manure to be captured in the gutter.

Milk tanks: A piece of assistive technology to help feed calves is a milk taxi, calf mobile, or milk shuttle. Options for these devices range from small and simple to large and complex. Although there are many makes and models, the general concept includes an insulated or heated milk storage tank on wheels with an easy dispensing system. This tool can easily transport milk from the milk house to the calves. It eliminates lifting or carrying heavy buckets and saves time by reducing the number of trips back and forth. Devices with a heating option can keep milk warm for longer periods, allowing a farmer to work at a slower pace if needed. Most of these tools are also designed with self-cleaning or easy-to-clean setups.

Other dairy-related assistive technology includes crowd gates, air operated entry and exit gates in a parlor, motorized feed carts, cushioned mats on the parlor floor, and even cow monitoring systems.

Farmers often hesitate at the thought of changing the way they have milked their whole life, and the logistics and finances can also cause some stress. However, many AgrAbility PA clients who modify their milking routine share that they wish they would not have waited so long before making the change. These modifications truly make a significant difference in a farmer's day-to-day routine around the barn.

To learn more about AgrAbility PA, visit agrability.org or call 814-867-5288. For information about AgrAbility projects in other states, visit agrability.org or call 800-825-4264.

AgrAbility PA, located in Chambersburg, Pa., is a nonprofit organization that provides funding for the improvements at a lower cost. They cannot recommend physical property or capital improvements, but work to use technology and equipment modifications to help clients.

Another example of technology and equipment improvements were made in the milking parlor of the Lehman family's dairy farm in Chambersburg, Pa. Sons Colby and Tim were both born with Dzygve-Mekhoir-Clausen syndrome, a rare genetic bone disorder that limited their heights to 48 inches and 46 inches, respectively.

After their farm assessment, AgrAbility PA worked with an assistive technology company that custom-made powered trolleys mounted to rails that were installed on both sides of their milking parlor. Prior to this, the young men were climbing stools to attach and detach milking units, leading to concerns about safety and long-term joint complications.

Automatic takeoffs were installed, as well as power-operated steps to enter and exit the milking parlor. Parents Tina and Lester Lehman were grateful to AgrAbility PA and its efforts to make their sons' lives easier on the farm. "We are so grateful to AgrAbility's involvement in helping us identify equipment and modifications that make a huge difference for the boys," Tina said.

Helping over 10,000

"Every state has its own unique landscape for farming and farm cultures," Kendra said, "but the common thread is the passion that farmers have for their vocation and their desire to continue to work on the farm despite the challenges they face daily."

AgrAbility estimates that the program has provided direct, on-farm services to more than 10,000 people since it began in 1991. During the past decade, AgrAbility has averaged approximately 1,300 direct-service clients nationwide per year. The most common disabling conditions are back issues, arthritis, and other joint-related issues, although traumatic injuries and other health considerations have been addressed.



For more information about the National AgrAbility Project, visit its website at www.agrability.org, its Facebook page: National AgrAbility Project, or Twitter: @NatAgrAbility or #agrability25.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AGRABILITY PA

380 June 2018

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128 February 2018



PAIN GOT PROGRESSIVELY WORSE as the years went by for Heidi Straubhaar. Thanks to assistance from AgrAbility, she no longer treks through daily tasks in pain.

up and down the uneven terrain on the farmstead, carrying milk, supplies and equipment. A blade in the front doubles as a feed pusher and snow plow that can get between the calf hutches. In the milking parlor, they added an additional rubber mat to provide more cushion and bring the platform up a little higher, making it easier to attach units. The system originally had plastic cups on the floor level where the units were attached to the cleaning system after the milking was complete. They replaced this with a wash drawer that is at waist level, eliminating bending to attach the units after milking. "By the time I got to the last one of the 16 units, I'd get down on the floor to connect it and I couldn't get back up again," Heidi said when discussing the prior situation.

Made it possible

"Without AgrAbility, I would never have been able to keep up with all my jobs on the farm," says Heidi. "I think there are many farmers who could benefit from this program." Heidi says, "In my case, some people might not understand why I needed to get help. If a farmer loses an arm or a leg, people can see that, but they can't see pain. Many people didn't know the pain I am in every day just doing routine things. It wears you down."

The largest number of disabilities of the clients served are classified as chronic, including back problems, arthritis and joint. About one-fourth of the participants suffered farm-related injuries or limb loss, and AgrAbility helped them continue in business despite their injury. Paul Levensen has been the director of the Easter Seals' FARM program in Wisconsin from the start. He says, "When we started, I came out to the farm and made recommendations, but often the farmers couldn't afford to implement the changes, so nothing was done. Then we started working more closely with DVR to help them understand the farming business and the importance of these services."

With all of the success AgrAbility has had in Wisconsin there is still one stigma to overcome. Some farmer clients are worried that their neighbors will think if they took "hand outs." Often farmers' pride prevents them from seeking help because of their independence. "What farmers with disabilities need to understand is that this service (from DVR) is available to everyone in the state, not just to farmers," comments Dick Straub, Wisconsin AgrAbility director. "DVR's aim is to keep workers working."

He says the guilt shouldn't be there either because farmers need to realize how much they contribute to their local communities by being able to stay in business. "Two years ago he rolled a log over the same knee. The doctor said it moved the knee cap over 3/8 of an inch," he said, "and I had no choice—I was getting a new knee." His son, Blane, had also faced health issues after a life-threatening skid-steer accident in December of 2000, when he was only 18 years old. Freezing rain and ice had frozen the pedals of their new skid-steer, so he raised the bucket and engaged the safety switch. He then climbed out and tried to free the



Adapting to adversity

Family, faith, and friends helped them recover; AgrAbility kept them farming.

by Andrea Stoltzfus

HEALTH problems would be the only thing that would keep him from farming, according to Tim Sturgeon. He and his family of Camp Run Holsteins in Fombl, Pa. have seen some serious health problems over the last 10 years. But thanks to AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians, today he and his sons are looking forward to a brighter future in dairy farming.



Sturgeon

AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians is a USDA-funded project that partners Penn State Cooperative Extension, Easter Seals Central Pennsylvania, and PA Assistive Technology Foundation. They bring information and service to farmers and farm family members affected by disability in rural areas of the state.

In November 2003, Tim was moving a cow from a box stall when her feet went out from under her, knocking him down and falling on top of his leg. An MRI a month later revealed a small growth on his knee. After a painful winter, he underwent surgery in March.

By then, the growth had grown considerably, Tim said. After surgery to remove it, he became allergic to the stitches used, and the incision became infected. Once fully recovered, walking was still difficult for him, especially over uneven ground. Getting on and off the farm's older tractors was challenging, as well.

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breathing again while in the air, where it was necessary to bring him back to life for the second time. Blane was in a coma for 3-1/2 days, Tim said. He remembered little of the accident or the first days in the hospital. One lung was fully collapsed, the other partially collapsed, and his heart was bruised. His chest cavity was completely crushed, and he sustained injuries to his shoulder. "The first winter after the accident Blane would come out to the barn, but cold really bothered his lungs," Tim said. "We got to know his doctor very well, and he recommended that he not go back to farming."

A farmer — meant to farm

That recommendation didn't stop Blane from joining his father and two brothers full time as soon as his health allowed. However, the accident had injured his back and his fine motor skills, as well as his range of motion in his arms. As the primary person in charge of feeding, it was difficult for him to shovel feed every day to their herd of registered Holsteins.

Talking with Bill Chess, their county extension educator, Tim mentioned some of the difficulties he and his son were facing. Chess put them in touch with AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians.

"I really didn't know anything about the program," Tim said. "He helped us fill out the applications and get the ball rolling with the people involved."

AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians helps individuals who are coping with many different kinds of physical challenges, including arthritis, stroke, knee and back problems, amputations, vision and hearing disabilities, and many others. Staff members visited the family at the farm to learn what tasks had become most difficult and/or posed the most risk for secondary injury. Tim said they really listened and helped come up with many solutions to the challenges they were dealing with. Funding support for the priority list of modifications came through the PA Office for Vocational Rehabilitation, or OVR.



REGARDLESS OF SETBACKS, the Sturgeons continue to operate Camp Run Holsteins. L to R: Delaney, Chris, Chae, Thad, Seth, Kathy, Elsie, Tim, Wade, Blane, Jackie. Not pictured is Zeke.

5000. Herd size in the two free stall barns is 130 cows, milking and dry. "Eventually we are trying to grow and build the herd from within," Tim said. Perhaps the biggest improvement for Tim was the addition of a Kubota RTV900 utility vehicle. "There's not a day that goes by that we don't use it," he said. "It's so much easier for me than getting in and out of a pickup, and we use it to go back and forth all over the farm."

According to Crystal Smithmyer, outreach specialist with AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians, once an individual is ready to inquire about services, they contact the AgrAbility office and set up a site visit. "Staff members then visit the farm in person and discuss what kinds of chores have become difficult or impossible," she said. "A priority list is created that highlights those items that the farmer most needs or wants to have."

With the client's permission, the list is then shared with the Office for Vocational Rehabilitation. "OVR determines that it meets their criteria — a majority of the farmer's income must come from the farm in order to receive OVR funding," she added. An OVR case worker then works with the farmer to procure bids from vendors for projects.

"It typically takes six months to a year to get through the OVR process," Smithmyer said. "AgrAbility will work with any farmer, large or small. We have worked with more than 300 producers, and there isn't any cost to them."

"Tim's three sons all work full time at the farm, though he notes each has some special interests they are able to pursue. "That does some cattle marketing, Wade does some cattle fitting, and Blane has a combine and a truck for custom work," he said. Tim himself has sold Pioneer seeds since 1981. Tim's grandchildren make the seventh generation on the farm. "With small kids around, we have some specific rules about farm safety, but you can never be careful enough," Tim said. He added it was a long

M.S. doesn't slow down this dairymoman

by Bill Snow

THE initials M.S. at the 4 Corners Farm in central Vermont does not stand for Milking Shorthorns. It instead stands for a daily challenge that confronts Kim Gray. Kim and her husband, Bob, operate a combination dairy and vegetable farm in Newbury. The dairy operation began when the couple decided to expand their vegetable operation by purchasing the neighboring farm which had an existing dairy barn. Kim had always wanted to have some cows, so she purchased her first registered Jerseys at the Vermont State Jersey Sale in 1991. The current herd still has descendants from the original purchase. For the last decade, she has maintained a herd average of 18,600 pounds per cow.

The 43-head dairy operation complements the vegetable business. The cows use a rotational pasture program during the grazing season. The Grays have also learned that their vegetable customers enjoy having the cows close by, so dry cows and older heifers pasture across the road from the vegetable stand.

Of course, the cows provide manure for the vegetables but also help with the land rotation program. Land used for strawberries is put back into hay land production as the yield drops.

Kim is the manager of the dairy

The author is a retired extension dairy specialist now working for AgrAbility in Vermont.

operation, and she and Bob run 50 acres of vegetables and 12 greenhouses. The winter feeding program for the dairy herd consists of 50 percent round bale silage and 50 percent corn silage. Kim does tractor work for both operations and does the morning milking. She has one employee for the dairy, Bill Braddon, who does the evening



milking and fencing. He is also involved with doing the irrigation and strawberry production.

Dealing with M.S. . . .

Both Bob and Kim grew up in southern Vermont before moving north. They both love skiing and both were former Olympic skiers. But Bob had both hips replaced a year ago which terminated skiing for awhile. Kim also has not been able to ski because she has M.S. (multiple sclerosis).

Multiple sclerosis is "a degenerative disease of the central nervous

system in which hardening of tissue occurs throughout the brain or spinal cord or both." Kim's first symptoms were blurred vision which, like most farmers, she put off going to see a doctor because it was nothing and too busy to make time. Further testing by an MRI indicated M.S. in 1997. At that time, she could walk and even run.

Currently, she walks with a ski pole. Keeping active with the cows has slowed the progression of the disease, and she is determined to keep the cows as long as she can. As Kim, now 51, says: "I have M.S., but it doesn't have me!"

Kim was referred to Northern New England AgrAbility by a neighboring dairy farmer involved with the program. The AgrAbility program is committed to supporting farm families affected by a disability to be productive and successful in agriculture.

Kim's M.S. is in her spine and directly affects her legs. She is affected by heat which causes inflammation and weakness which makes it difficult for her to complete her work tasks. Eliminating stress and eating well are important, too. She knows that she has

to keep physically active to prevent atrophy of her muscles.

The AgrAbility program, with assistance from Rural and Agriculture Vocational Rehabilitation in Vermont, was able to assist in purchasing two canopies for the two tractors she uses the most. Installing the canopies provided protection from the direct sun.

Services are available at no cost to farm families. The program provides:

- assessing agricultural tasks and providing guidance to accommodate for the disability
 - evaluating agricultural work sites and equipment and making suggestions or modifications
 - researching commercially available products to enable farm tasks to become easier
 - identifying ways to prevent secondary injury and illness
 - coordinating peer support and other resource networks
 - conducting training and workshops for rehabilitation and agricultural professionals
- Approximately one-half of the states have AgrAbility project staff. To learn more information, visit www.agrabilityproject.org, or contact AgrAbility Project, USDA Cooperative State Research, Education-Extension Service, 1400 Independence Ave. S.W. STOP 2220, Washington D.C. 20250-2220; phone: (202) 401-6825.

AgrAbility keeps farmers farming

The project not only offers a second chance for disabled farmers, modified equipment prevents further injury or strain on the body.

by Gloria Hafemeister

HEIDI and Mike Straubhaar's Blue Mounds, Wis., dairy farm is in what most people term "God's country." Heidi, who suffers from spinal degeneration, says, "The problem is, God loves hills. As beautiful as it is on these hills, walking up and down the steep uneven terrain gets so painful that



HAFEMEISTER

The author is an agr writer based in Hustisford, Wis. She and her husband operate a 200-acre, 80-cow dairy farm with their son, David.

some days after I finish chores the only way I can get back up the hill is by walking backwards."

Heidi's body was telling her to quit feeding calves and helping with chores on the farm they hoped to one day turn over to their son. Meanwhile, her mind and heart were telling her otherwise.

"I love doing my part on this farm, and keeping my calves healthy is my passion," she says, "but painful hips were making it more and more difficult for me to do any of the routine chores."

Bruce Whitmore, a farm counselor with Easter Seals FARM program, came out to look at Heidi's farm tasks. Together, they came up with ideas to make her job physically less demanding. Working through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), they modified some things and replaced others.

The Straubhaar family operates 450 acres, raising corn and alfalfa for their 225-cow dairy herd and the accompanying young stock. They milk cows in a double-8 parlor that is attached to the free stall barn they built on a hill where the cows benefit from the cool summer breezes.

They had been pasteurizing discard milk that Heidi then took down the hill to feed the calves. Transporting the milk was a difficult job for her until they replaced the older pasteurizer with a portable unit.

Now she uses a Power Milk Taxi (shown above) to dispense milk and water without having to carry it. They moved the pail holders outside the wire around the hutch to eliminate climbing into or reaching over the wire front of the hutch. The new equipment took a lot of strain off her back and hips.

They also got an ATV that enables her to move

OVER 11,000 HELPED BY AGRABILITY

A few more examples



Four tips

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The response I never expected

Robots have a different intelligence

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