



# **Adaptive Farming with the New Mexico AgrAbility Apprenticeship Program**

April Cox  
[april@mandysfarm.org](mailto:april@mandysfarm.org)

# Project Partners

Sonja Koukel  
Paul Gutierrez  
Eduardo Medina



Tracy Agiovlasitis  
Deborah Wieclaw

Carla Wilhite



Jessie Calero  
April Cox

# What do we do?

- Education/ training
- Direct services through statewide assessments/ assistive technology
- Networking/ outreach
- AgrAbility Apprenticeship program- Training new Food Growers & Agricultural Workers





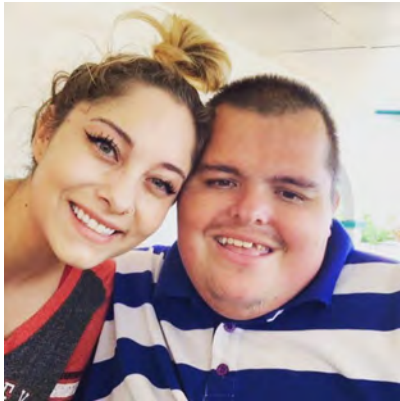
## **Non- Profit Partner of the New Mexico AgrAbility Project**

Mandy's Farm is a nonprofit organization that assists individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities in achieving their goals for living, learning, and working in the community.

Mandy's Farm supports over 200 individuals and their families each month by providing services in employment, housing, education, and training.

Mandy's Farm is in the Rio Grande River Valley of Albuquerque New Mexico, on a farm, with chickens, dogs, goats, alpacas, and a focus on growing specialty crops.

Community Members are able to participate in daily workshops covering animal husbandry, farm skills classes, adaptive horse riding, and more.



**How many people in this room know someone with a developmental or intellectual disability?**

**Of those people you know, how many are currently employed?**



# NM AgrAbility Apprenticeship Program

- Open to anyone with a disability who has an interest in gaining small scale farm education and on the job training for a future career in agriculture
- 10 Apprenticeships are available annually
- Two year commitment with flexible hours
- The apprentices have access to over 4 acres of growing space, water, grazing animals, tools, and other infrastructure for practicing and learning about small scale farming



# Overview of the NM AgrAbility Apprenticeship Program

## First Year Apprentices:

- Learn adaptive farming techniques and use of adaptive tools
- Work on the farm practicing and trying out what they are learning
- Volunteer their time educating their community through farm workshops
- UNM Occupational Therapy Students provide safety training and educational supports



## Overview of the NM AgrAbility Apprenticeship Program



- UNM Occupational Therapy Students provide individualized supports for the food growers and their businesses.

### **Second Year Apprentices:**

- Plan and implement their own small farm business on land provided by Mandy's farm
- Tools and some start-up equipment, seeds, provided by Mandy's Farm and donors
- Volunteer their time educating their community through farm workshops and mentorships
- Complete the program with a resume, 2 years of farming experience, and opportunities for further support through community partnerships



# Everyone Starts Somewhere

- **Apprentices start the program with everything they need to be successful in growing their own food. Including land, seeds, educational support, adapted tools, and direct assistance.**
- **The program provides education on diverse person-centered food growing methods for small scale farm operations.**
- **With a focus on safety, students are able to learn and grow skills that will serve them in all areas of life.**
- **A good farmer is not made in a year.**



# Make the Work Meaningful

- **We work smarter not harder, We plan work around safety and longevity**
- **We match work to the workers strengths and support people in trying new things and going outside of their comfort zone.**
- **We practice sharing knowledge with one another. We respect the experience of our team.**
- **We value everyone's contribution.**



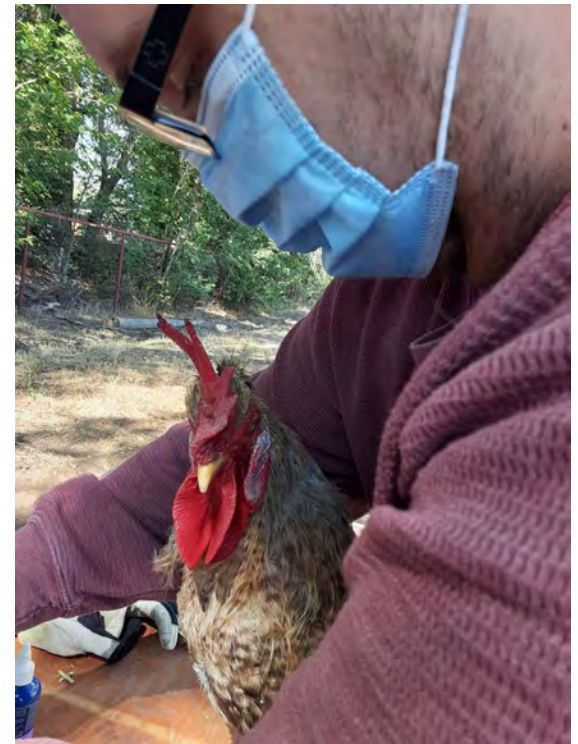
# We All Work Together

- **We offer community workshops for Apprentices to teach others what they are learning.**
- **Direct Support Professionals and family are encouraged to participate in the program expanding their knowledge of agriculture and how to be supportive.**
- **Apprentices are teamed up for different sessions based on their strengths and knowledge in order to build mentorship and support between different experience levels.**



# **Flexibility is Essential**

- **We learn by doing. In real life things don't always go our way. (Livestock death, pests, people, plans)**
- **Teach all the learning styles by offering information in a variety of ways, revisit anything as needed**
- **Movement and body mechanics are a big focus of the training program.**



**NM AgrAbility  
Apprentices  
learning and  
working at Mandy's  
Farm**

**Apprentices in the program get to learn how to grow food through direct hands-on experience. Apprentices learn by doing, allowing them to see the direct results of their work. They are some of the most reliable farm workers you will meet.**



Apprentices can choose to use what they have learned to start their own businesses. Mandy's Farm provides infrastructure and assistance to launch their farming business.



# Curriculum

- Starts in the early spring with indoor seed starting and goes through the fall with harvest
- Use visual Supports for regular farm tasks
- Implementation of the Daily Farm Journal
- Cellphone Apps & cameras
- Financial Education and training through the market season
- Videos so apprentices can revisit each lesson
- Incorporates volunteering on local farms which creates a job networks and mentorship





# Create universal spaces and teaching methods

- Adaptive Tools are available to the apprentices through grant funding
- Color codes for safety risks
- Skill Building through practice and mastery
- Variety of growing methods that can be adapted to differing abilities
- Site is continuing to increase its accessibility across all it's agriculture programs and spaces
- NMTAP AT lending partnership



# Connecting Apprentices

- Apprentices raise “seed money” through sales of produce and value added goods created while learning
- Apprentices are educated about the costs of running their own business
- The Apprenticeship networks with other organizations/farms to build opportunities for the next stage of growth
- Seeking grants to provide stipends for second year apprentices while they build their businesses.



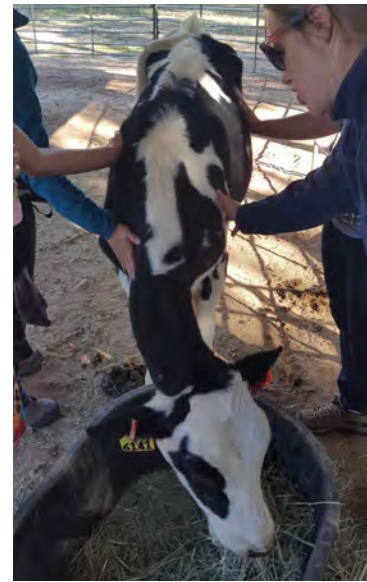
# Outcomes and Increased Access

## The AgrAbility Apprenticeship Program

- Of the apprentices that have participated in the program, 15% had previous experience with agricultural work.
- 100% have continued to grow food even if they aren't currently working in agriculture.
- 75% of the interns from other programs have continued to participate in the apprenticeship program.
- 2 of the former apprentices are currently building up their farm businesses
- 4 apprentices have entered the agricultural/conservation related workforce.



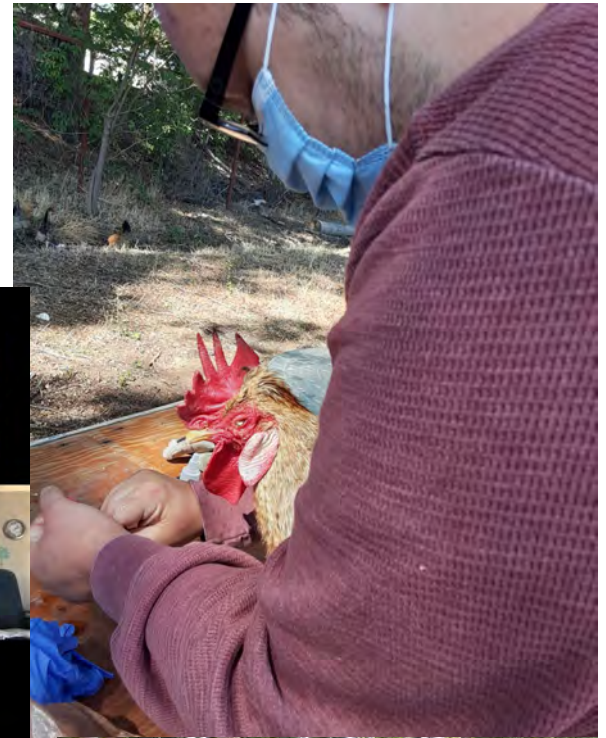
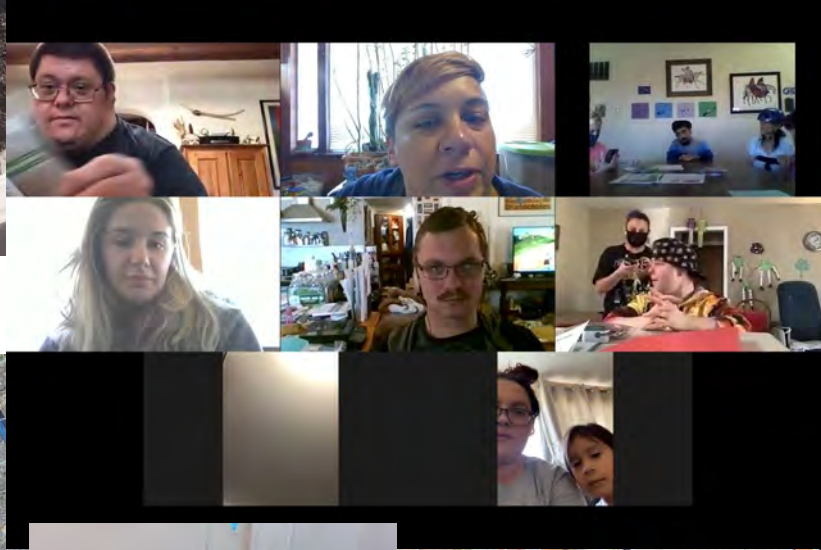
# 2019



# 2020



# 2021...



New Mexico  
  
Cultivating Accessible Agriculture



@nmagrability



<http://agrability.nmsu.edu>



<http://www.mandysfarm.org>



@mandysfarmnm



@mandysfarm