

AgrAbility Harvest

*An ingathering of
helpful information
on disability in
agriculture*

2016

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inside

2 A CLOSER LOOK Small is BIG

4 AT CORNER

Livestock Production –
Big and Small

5 RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

- New resources for veterans in agriculture
- Arthritis and Gardening
- Keep up with AgrAbility news
- AgrAbility: appearing soon on a mobile device near you

6 PARTNER UPDATES

- FSA
- RESNA

7 PATCHWORK

An Assortment of
Sundry News Items

8 ON THE HORIZON

Anniversaries

are a time to remember and celebrate. As the AgrAbility Program turns 25 in 2016, the National AgrAbility Project (NAP) is partnering with the state AgrAbility projects and several other organizations to remember and celebrate the impact the program has made since 1991.

It's not merely the AgrAbility Program itself we're celebrating: it's the farmers, ranchers, migrant/seasonal farmworkers, and family members that AgrAbility serves. Many of them have overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to continue their agricultural lifestyles and livelihoods. They personify a spirit of determination and fortitude that is rare and inspiring.

To honor them and illustrate AgrAbility's impact, the NAP has launched the **25 Years, 25 Stories** campaign that highlights 25 of the people and programs that exemplify AgrAbility's mission. We're sharing these stories on our website at www.agrability.org/25years, our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/nationalagrability, our Twitter account [@NatlAgrAbility](https://twitter.com/NatlAgrAbility) ([#agrability25](https://twitter.com/NatlAgrAbility)), and in a print and electronic publication scheduled for summer.

Celebration events are scheduled for the annual AgrAbility National Training Workshop in Fort Collins, Colorado, April 11-14. Special speakers for the conference include Temple Grandin, renowned animal behaviorist and autism advocate. Get details at www.agrability.org/ntw, and see more on page 7.

Additional events are planned in conjunction with the RESNA Annual Conference in Arlington, Virginia, July 10-14. AgrAbility is planning to conduct multiple workshops as part of the event, host a display in the exhibition hall, and sponsor a celebration luncheon on July 12. Invitees for the latter event include AgrAbility clients, collaborating organizations, and other key stakeholders. Information will be available at www.resna.org.

Consider how you might join the 25th anniversary celebration and promote AgrAbility's mission of cultivating accessible agriculture. Share one of our Facebook posts, retweet a client story, come to the NTW, or join us at the RESNA conference. This is one celebration where there's plenty of room for everyone.



 **AgrAbility**

Cultivating Accessible Agriculture

A Closer Look

Small is BIG

Fueled in part by the local food movement, small-scale agricultural production holds potential benefits – and risks – for farmers with disabilities, including veterans

You don't have to be a farmer or agricultural economist to be aware of the "small ag movement." A trip to the grocery store, look at a newspaper, or visit to your favorite social media source will likely expose you to catchphrases like, "buy local," "organic," "sustainable," "whole food," or "farm-to-fork."

Some seem to paint small agriculture as the cure for all ills, both personal and societal. Whole-some food, back to nature, healthy lifestyle, therapeutic work, better living through less chemistry. However, others point out possible pitfalls, including financial stresses.

What is small?

According to USDA definitions, a "small farm" is one having less than \$250,000 in gross cash farm income (GCFI). However, 60% of small farms have less than \$10,000 in GCFI, and 22% have less than \$1000. Thus, there is a wide range within "small." In total, small farms account for 91% of all U.S. farms and 23% of all agricultural production. In many cases, small farm owners have off-farm employment to supplement their income.¹

Advantages and opportunities

One of the common complaints of budding new farmers is the entry cost. Even though land prices are currently dropping in some areas, the purchase price is still insurmountable for most. In addition, the cost of equipment will likely compound with size of the enterprise.

Small-scale agriculture, on the other hand, can make starting a farm-related career more affordable. While there are a multitude of factors that influence costs, some small-scale agriculturalists begin with just a few acres. And the option of urban agriculture



An urban farm in Chicago

brings opportunities for utilizing vacant lots, roof tops, garages, or unused buildings.

Potential markets for small agriculture are also plentiful. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the number of farmers' markets nearly doubled from 1998 figures. Community supported agricultural enterprises (CSAs) – entities that supply fresh produce directly to consumers, generally through a subscription system – are also gaining popularity. Other small producers choose to market their goods directly to restaurants or schools.²

Small-scale agriculture may be especially appealing to people with disabilities and veterans for several reasons. Tasks can be easier to customize for people with limitations, especially with the use of assistive technology, such as tools found in AgrAbility's Toolbox Assistive Technology Database. Those experiencing issues like post-traumatic stress disorder may find agrarian settings more therapeutic than highly structured offices or factories. The healing potential of working with animals is also well-documented.

Is it "veggies or nothing"?

While the focus often seems to be on raising fresh fruits and vegetables, other opportunities abound. Small-scale livestock production, like chickens, goats, and rabbits, are popular. Aquaculture (fish farming), hydroponics (growing produce without soil), and aquaponics (raising fish and produce in



Many technologies are available for small-scale production

a symbiotic system) are becoming more feasible and can be accomplished in a relatively small space. In the big picture, according to the USDA, the most popular commodities raised on small farms are beef, hay, poultry, and grain/soybeans – none of which require a full-time labor commitment.

AgrAbility can help

In Georgia, Ruby Davis operates Ruby's Garden, an organic garden farm that hosts a goat herd and produces vegetable crops, poultry, and eggs. Davis, a retired nurse in her mid-70s, has been limited by arthritis in her abilities to lift, open containers, and hold needed tools. The Georgia AgrAbility team assisted Ruby with getting a "chicken tractor" – essentially a small, portable chicken coop on wheels – that she can move herself to provide fresh grass for her free-range poultry. They also helped her put up a hoop house greenhouse that enables her to keep producing vegetables after the normal growing season ends. Ruby's customers include a school system, a rescue mission, and several grocery stores.

Zach Morris completed dangerous deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan as an Army infantryman, but the impact of those experiences didn't fully hit him until he returned home to Indiana. He relates that the stress of combat isn't like an "on-off switch" that one can simply deactivate. However, Zach believes that farming is the closest thing he's found to a "reset button for the human soul." He also finds that many of the disciplines he learned in the military aid him in fulfilling his new mission: Freebird Farm & Homestead, which produces a variety of crops, including produce, poultry, eggs, and value-added goat milk products.

Zach works not only with Indiana AgrAbility but also the Farmer Veteran Coalition through which he was certified to use the Homegrown by Heroes label that sets his products apart as veteran-produced.

Happily ever after?

Few would admit to seeing agriculture as a fairytale lifestyle. However, the agrarian life can be easily idealized, especially to younger beginning farmers. The bottom line: it's important to look at the bottom line. Can you earn a livelihood? Do you have a supplemental income source? Have you calculated the amount of work entailed?

Opportunities abound in small-scale agriculture, but as with most aspects of life, it's essential to count the costs.

¹ Hoppe, R., J. MacDonald, and P. Korb. *Small Farms in the United States: Persistence Under Pressure*. Economic Information Bulletin No. (EIB-63) 39 pp, February 2010.

² Martinez, S., M. Hand, M. Da Pra, S. Pollack, K. Ralston, T. Smith, S. Vogel, S. Clark, L. Lohr, S. Low, and C. Newman. *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*. Economic Research Report No. (ERR-97) 87 pp, May 2010.



Ruby Davis



Zach Morris

Livestock Production – Big and Small

As niche markets have grown, livestock production has come to include a lot more than just cattle, hogs, and sheep. Thankfully, there are assistive technology devices available for just about any menagerie. Here are a few of the many products listed in The Toolbox Assistive Technology Database to help with raising livestock of all shapes and sizes.



Henry Goat-Milking Kit. Includes pressure-regulated vacuum pump, sealed-lid milk jars, teat cups, milking lines, and cleaning brush. The kit can make the job easier on both hands and back, because milking is done via the pump and one isn't confined to a single position. Also, since the milk goes through the lines from teats to jars, it stays clean. (Visit www.henrymilker.com.)

Solar-Powered Livestock Feeder.

A vehicle-towed feed cart (consisting of hopper and troughs) that can be programmed to release pre-set amounts of feed at given intervals. When activated (by timer or push-button), the feed drops from hopper into a spinner plate, which distributes it into the troughs. The system runs off a 12-volt battery charged by solar panels atop the unit. (Visit www.solarfeeders.com.)



ATV-Mounted Calf Catcher.

A four-wheeled 'cage' that's first towed out to the pasture then manually attached to right side of the ATV. To catch a calf, the driver (1) pulls a rope that opens and latches a spring-loaded gate, (2) maneuvers alongside the animal, then (3) once it's corralled, steps on a latch-release mechanism, which shuts the gate. (Visit www.calfid.com.)



Homemade Rabbit Tractors. Built by Missouri farmer Caleb Howerton, they're 4' x 8' portable pens that he vehicle-tows every day or so throughout his pasture. Each pen consists of a 2" x 6" board frame, a cattle panel, chicken wire over 2" x 2" welded wire, 8' tin-sheet roof, and wire-mesh floor. Similar tractors can be made for chickens, ducks, and hogs.



Power-Plucker Feather Remover.

Consists of three sets of dual rubber fingers protruding from a rotating 'drum' at the end of a 10-inch steel shaft that fits a 5/8-inch or larger drill, which is either hand-held or clamped to the edge of a table. It can reportedly clean a scalded bird in about 90 seconds without damaging its skin or meat. (Visit www.powerplucker.com.)



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

Resources for Success

New resources for veterans in agriculture

Farmer Veteran Coalition State Chapters

The Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) is a key resource for any veteran with an interest in agriculture. In addition to sponsoring the Homegrown by Heroes label to assist in marketing veteran-grown commodities, FVC sponsors a Fellowship Fund to assist veterans with careers in agriculture, conducts conferences and workshops, and provides a variety of other services. The organization also helps to support Farmer Veteran AgrAbility Coordinator Cindy Chastain's work.

FVC is now expanding its efforts to provide personalized services at a regional level. Having established the first state FVC chapter in Iowa several years ago, the organization recently chartered state chapters in Maine, Michigan, Vermont, and Kansas.

Membership in FVC is free. See www.farmvetco.org for more information.

New USDA veteran liaison



Lanon Baccam was appointed the USDA's military veterans agricultural liaison following the departure of Karis Gutter. Baccam spent eight years in the U.S. Army and Iowa National Guard and was deployed to Afghanistan in 2004-2005. He is scheduled to participate in the 2016 NTW in Colorado.

AgrAbility veterans' web page

The NAP has added an extensive list of resources for veterans and beginning farmers to its website. Included is information on veteran-run agricultural training programs, websites for farmer veterans, information on government programs like the Farm Bill and G.I. Bill, caregiver information, and much more. Look under Veterans & Beginning Farmers on the main menu of www.agrability.org.

Arthritis and Gardening

Gardening is one of America's most popular hobbies, and arthritis is America's leading cause of disability. However, don't assume that one must give up gardening, including small-scale agricultural production enterprises, when arthritis pain strikes.

The National AgrAbility Project, led by partnering organization the Arthritis Foundation-Heartland Region, assembled a working group of state AgrAbility Project staff members and professionals from Extension and nonprofit organizations to produce a new resource: **Arthritis and Gardening – A Guide for Home Gardeners and Small-Scale Producers**. This 20-page booklet covers such topics as preplanning your garden to accommodate arthritis, helpful tools and accessories, preparing your body for gardening activities, and minimizing arthritis pain while gardening.

Contact Amber Wolfe of the Arthritis Foundation – Heartland Region awolfe@arthritis.org for information on ordering.



Keep up with AgrAbility news

While financial and time constraints limit publication of AgrAbility Harvest to one annual issue, there are many ways to stay in touch with AgrAbility news.

The National and many state AgrAbility projects maintain a strong presence in social media, including Facebook and Twitter. Just search under "AgrAbility" and then "like" or "follow" your favorite projects.

The National AgrAbility Project also publishes the e-Note, a monthly electronic newsletter that includes updates, coming events, and other news from AgrAbility projects around the country. You can sign up for it at www.tinyurl.com/agrability-enote.

AgrAbility: appearing soon on a mobile device near you

As consumers increasingly shift from fixed desktop computers to mobile devices like smartphones and tablets, AgrAbility is moving with them. After months of extensive development, the main National AgrAbility Project website is shifting to a mobile-friendly format. While the same great content will be available, including The Toolbox Assistive Technology Database, the display will adjust to the particular device you use, be it phone, tablet, laptop, or desktop. The new format also allows for easy adjustment of features like text size and will facilitate more rapid updates by NAP staff members.





Partner Updates



FSA - USDA's Farm Service Agency

For many years, FSA has been a partner to AgrAbility Projects and to the clientele they serve. While most people involved with agriculture know something about the agency, it's likely they're not familiar with all of the programs that it administers.

Farm loans are among FSA's best-known initiatives. The agency can guarantee loans from commercial lenders or loan directly using government funds. Loans categories include farm ownership, operational expenses, conservation practices, and emergencies caused by natural disasters. FSA can also guarantee land contracts to help beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers acquire land.

Some loan programs of special interest to AgrAbility clients include microloans of up to \$50,000 for small operations, beginning farmer and rancher loans, minority and women loans, and youth loans to those 10-20 years of age for projects connected to 4-H or FFA.

FSA's conservation programs are also popular. The goals of these efforts include protecting drinking water, reducing soil erosion, preserving wildlife habitats, and restoring forests and wetlands. In general, these programs pay agriculturalists a yearly rental fee for choosing to not use certain land for production.

To help protect producers from excessive financial risk, FSA also administers crop insurance and price support programs to bridge the gap between production costs and harvest revenues.

Some of FSA's lesser-known programs include supports for those growing biomass crops for conversion to bioenergy, the Boll Weevil Eradication Loan Program, and several programs to assist dairy producers, including one that purchases their products for assistance to low-income populations.

The agency has also maintained a robust outreach program that has provided direct funding to some AgrAbility Projects to conduct services and provide educational opportunities.

A wealth of information about FSA is available on the Internet, and the best place to start is www.fsa.usda.gov.



RESNA – the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America

RESNA's mission, "To maximize the health and well-being of people with disabilities through technology," closely parallels AgrAbility's vision of enhancing quality of life for agricultural workers with disabilities. Thus, it is easy to see why the two organizations have enjoyed a long collaborative relationship.

Breaking New Ground Project Leader Bill Field became involved with RESNA in the mid-1980s, soon after the society was founded in 1979 and prior to AgrAbility's launch in 1991. Two of the early AgrAbility National Training Workshops were held in conjunction with RESNA annual conferences.

Assistive technology (AT) is the key link between AgrAbility and RESNA. AT is defined by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as, "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a person with a disability." One of the ways that RESNA assists AgrAbility is by providing Assistive Technology Professional (ATP) certification, which recognizes service providers' competence in analyzing consumers' needs, providing recommendations for AT, and assisting in any needed training for use of the AT. AgrAbility staff members from several states have earned ATP certification.

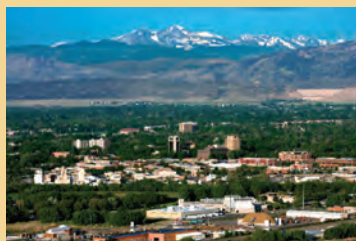
RESNA also provides direct input to the National AgrAbility Project through the AgrAbility Advisory Team, which meets in person or via teleconference several times a year to give feedback on NAP activities. RESNA Executive Director Michael Brogioli currently serves on the Advisory Team, as did his predecessor.

This year's RESNA Annual Conference is a first-ever collaboration with NCART, the National Coalition for Assistive and Rehab Technology. The event promises to provide outstanding opportunities for networking and continuing education, in addition to the opportunity to celebrate AgrAbility's 25th anniversary. Visit www.resna.org for details.



AgrAbility National Training Workshop

Come to the National Training Workshop (NTW) at Fort Collins, Colorado, and add your knowledge and experiences to the collective pool of expertise. While, as always, the event



features a variety of excellent educational sessions, some of the most valuable experiences occur in networking with others in the agricultural and rehabilitation communities and developing new relationships.

This year's NTW features several special speakers, including animal behaviorist Temple Grandin, "wheelchair cowgirl" Amberly Snyder who continues to participate in rodeo activities despite a spinal cord injury, and the USDA's new veteran liaison Lanon Baccam.

More than 40 breakout sessions will cover a wide range of topics of interest to professionals and consumers alike. New subject areas include farming with autism, the use of UAVs (drones), and legacy planning.

The conference is scheduled for April 11-14 at the Fort Collins Marriott. Registration closes April 8. Visit www.agrability.org/ntw for details.

AgrAbility Regional Training Workshops

The NTW isn't the only opportunity to gather with others interested in the AgrAbility mission. Regional workshops offer a smaller venue that allows for more personal networking and training in areas like worksite assessments, veterans' issues, and business planning.

The next AgrAbility Regional Training Workshop is scheduled for August 8-10 at the Bavarian Inn in Frankenmuth, MI. Check www.agrability.org for upcoming information about participating in this event.

The most recent regional workshop was held in Knoxville, TN, in August 2015. A total of 38 people participated in tours and sessions.



Dr. Deborah Reed shares in Knoxville

Special populations outreach continues

With support of USDA, CHS Foundation, Farmer Veteran Coalition, and other organizations, AgrAbility continues to expand educational efforts toward veterans and underserved populations.

Chuck Baldwin continues to lead the NAP's initiatives to impact underserved groups. In 2015, he and other staff members helped to organize AgrAbility workshops at two 1890 institutions: the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff

and Tuskegee University. In addition, NAP participated in conferences targeted to black farmers, and several 1890 staff members and



Participants at AgrAbility Tuskegee Workshop

clients attended the 2015 AgrAbility NTW. A 1994 land-grant college staff member presented at the same NTW, and two veterans with disabilities from the Crow Nation are scheduled to participate in the 2016 NTW.

Cesar Asuaje, an Extension agent from the University of Florida, participated in the 2015 NAP Advisory Team meeting to share insights about the needs of Latino migrant and seasonal farm workers.

The NAP's outreach to veterans with disabilities interested in agriculture is coordinated by Cindy Chastain. She and Project Leader Bill Field, along with staff members from eight state AgrAbility Projects, participated in the 2015 Farmer Veteran Coalition Stakeholder's Conference in Sacramento, California. Cindy also presented at the 2016 Farmer Veteran Coalition's Empowering Women Veterans conference in Pocantico Hills, NY, in March.

Cindy is coordinating the production of a soon-to-be-released video on veterans overcoming barriers to be successful in agriculture.



Farmer veteran James Jeffers is featured in a new AgrAbility video

AgrAbility Harvest

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ON THE HORIZON



Celebrate AgrAbility's 25th anniversary at two great events.

The annual AgrAbility National Training Workshop will be held in Fort Collins, Colorado, on April 11-14. The conference features several special speakers along with great educational sessions and tours. Visit www.agrability.org/ntw. AgrAbility will partner with RESNA during its annual conference in the Washington, D.C., area. The RESNA/NCART 2016 Conference, held July 10-14 in Arlington, Virginia, will feature several AgrAbility breakout sessions and an anniversary luncheon on July 12. See www.resna.org for more.



2016

April 7-10	AOTA Annual Conference and Expo	Chicago, IL	www.aota.org
April 11-14	AgrAbility National Training Workshop	Fort Collins, CO	www.agrability.org
June 8-10	World Pork Expo	Des Moines, IA	www.worldpork.org
June 9-11	Amputee Coalition National Conference	Greensboro, NC	www.amputee-coalition.org
July 10-14	RESNA Annual Conference	Arlington, VA	www.resna.org
June 26-30	International Society for Agricultural Safety & Health (ISASH) Annual Conference	Lexington, KY	www.isash.org
July 17-20	ASABE Annual International Meeting	Orlando, FL	www.asabemeetings.org
July 31-August 3	Disabled American Veterans National Convention	Atlanta, GA	www.dav.org/events
August 9-11	Empire Farm Days	Seneca Falls, NY	www.empirefarmdays.com
August 30-September 1	Farm Progress Show	Boone, IA	www.farmprogressshow.com
September 13-15	Husker Harvest Days	Grand Island, NE	www.huskerharvestdays.com
September 20-22	Farm Science Review	London, OH	www.fsr.osu.edu
October 4-8	World Dairy Expo	Madison, WI	www.world-dairy-expo.com
October 18-20	Sunbelt Ag Expo	Moultrie, GA	www.sunbeltexpo.com
October 19-22	National FFA Convention	Indianapolis, IN	www.ffa.org
October 21-24	APRIL Annual Conference	Reno, NV	www.april-rural.org