

AgrAbility Virginia



E-NEWS - SUMMER/FALL 2009

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FEATURED CLIENT: NANCY



NANCY; NEW FEEDERS; AUGER (BEFORE PROTECTIVE GRATE) FEEDING INTO MIXER

Nancy is a sheep farmer in Culpeper County. She raises approximately 200 sheep for meat, wool and show on about 200 acres. A farmer, all of her adult life, Nancy has been raising sheep for 20 years. She does this mostly solo, with occasional assistance from her daughter, who spends most of the year on the road, with her own horse photography business. Nancy's work consists of daily feedings, weekly grain mixing in her barn, lambing (early spring), transport of sheep, and regular maintenance of the property. It is very demanding work. Three years ago, Nancy had to have knee surgery. Her recovery was not complete before she was forced to go back to work. Consequently, her knees continue to cause her pain, and she has developed back pain from the stress and strain of her work, coupled with her effort to compensate for the pain in her knees. Feeding her sheep in the fields subjected her to a lot of shoving and bumping from the sheep. And moving and lifting various grain bags to put in her grain mixer were very stressful and

very time consuming, as she was forced to feed the grain into the mixer in small batches. Nancy was not sure whether she would be able to continue this way of working much longer. To address the sheep-feeding problem, AgrAbility was able to fabricate feeders from large food-approved plastic barrels cut in half and attached to the fence with aluminum brackets. Nancy is now able to pour the feed into the troughs from behind the fence, completely eliminating contact with the sheep, and having to open and close the gate. To address the grain-mixer problem, AgrAbility took an old, rusting grain auger that was laying in the grass, and an old motor sitting in the barn (had it rebuilt), rearranged the layout of the inside of the barn and setup a process for feeding the grain into the mixer. Now, Nancy only needs to pour the different grain into a slightly raised container, at the base of the auger, and the auger moves the grain to the top of mixer and dumps it. The materials for the services provided to Nancy were donated, purchased from the Easter Seals AgrAbility AT Fund, and purchased by Nancy. By addressing two major obstacles to her ability to work safely, effectively and with decreased pain, AgrAbility helped Nancy look forward to living the way of life she so much cherishes.

DR. GRISSO RECOGNIZED

Congratulations to Dr. Robert (Bobby) Grisso, the Virginia Tech Principle Investigator for AgrAbility Virginia, and Professor of Biological Systems Engineering in Virginia Tech's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and farm equipment and safety specialist for Virginia Cooperative Extension, upon his election into the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers' (ASABE) 2009 Class of Fellows. Dr. Grisso was formally presented with the honor at the annual ASABE meeting in Reno, Nev., on June 23. The rank of Fellow is bestowed on less than 2 percent of the society's members. According to ASABE, a Fellow is "... a member of unusual professional distinction, with outstanding and extraordinary qualifications and experience in, or related to, the field of agricultural, food, or biological systems engineering." Fellows have at least 20 years of experience in the engineering or engineering education field and have been a member of the organization for at least 20 years.

FARMING: STRESS, DEPRESSION, AND SUICIDE

Cases of suicide have been reported on farms across the country. It is no surprise that farm families are being negatively impacted by current market prices. Farm income is significantly lower while expenses have not dropped. This severe financial strain has caused elevated levels of stress for farm families. With the financial stress often comes emotional stress. There are a number of signs of stress that can be recognized by family, friends, employees, veterinarians, Extension professionals, school personnel, or health and human service workers. These signs include:

Changes in routine - family stops attending church, 4-H/FFA activities, or no longer stops at the coffee shop or feed mill.

Care of livestock declines - animals may not be cared for properly; show signs of neglect.

Increase in illness – may experience more colds, flu, aches, pains, etc.

Increase in farm accidents – stress causes fatigue which may result in increased accidents; children may not be well cared for.

Appearance of farmstead declines – family no longer takes pride in the way buildings and grounds appear.

Children show signs of stress – children may act out, be increasingly absent or show declines in academic performance.

Individuals or families experiencing prolonged stress may exhibit the following effects:

Physical – headaches, ulcers, backaches, sleep disturbance.

Emotional – sadness, depression, bitterness, anger, anxiety.

Behavioral – irritability, acting out, withdrawal.

Cognitive – memory loss, lack of concentration, inability to make decisions.

Self-Esteem – “I’m a failure.”, “I blew it.”, “Why Can’t I...?”

Signs of Depression

Signs of Suicidal Intent

Poor appearance

Anxiety

Unhappy feelings

Withdrawal

Negative thoughts

Helpless and hopeless

Reduced activity

Alcohol/drug abuse

People problems

Previous suicidal attempts

Physical problems

Suicidal plan

Guilt/low self esteem

Cries for help

If you recognize signs of depression or suicide in a friend or family member, consider the following:

1. Be aware of the services available in your local community and what they can offer.
2. Listen for signs the person or family needs help that you can't provide, i.e., financial, legal, counseling.
3. Assess what community resources would be most appropriate.
4. Discuss referral with the person or family, “It sounds/looks like you are feeling _____. I think _____ could help you deal with your situation.”
5. If the person/family is unwilling to take the initiative or where there is danger if no action is taken, you need to take the initiative.
 - Call an agency in the community that deals with these issues.
 - Identify yourself and your relationship with the person or family for whom you are seeking assistance.
 - Explain to the agency what you believe the person/family needs.
 - Provide information about the family and particulars of their situation.
 - Ask the agency what follow-up will be taken.

Many people are reluctant to get involved in these family situations because they are very personal issues. However, it is better to be proactive in getting help for the person/family than watching something tragic happen and wishing you had done something.

Source: *Farm and Ranch Family Stress and Depression: A Checklist for Making Referrals*, Roger T. Williams, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Robert J. Fetsch, Colorado State University. Available at: http://mtt.cahs.colostate.edu/current_issues/depression
An additional resource on the concern about suicides related to farming and the lack of access to mental health care can be found at: <http://iowaindependent.com/16472/farmer-suicides-spotlight-lack-of-mental-health>

CHILDREN'S FARM TASK GUIDELINES: SEARCHABLE ON-LINE

The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety has recently announced a new way to access one of its most important resources: [Searchable NAGCAT Guidelines](#).

The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT) were developed to assist parents in assigning farm jobs to their children 7-16 years of age living or working on farms. The guidelines take tasks often assigned to children and pose questions about a child's developmental abilities, their training, and adult supervision to determine if the task is appropriate to a specific child.

Lists of the guideline posters have been available on-line to professionals and groups who interact with farm parents. Now, a new search tool allows parents to locate guidelines by entering key words about farm tasks for their children. The search will return those guidelines which most closely match the tasks selected.

For more information about the guidelines, or any products or resources of the Children's Center, email the Center at NCCRAHS@mcrf.mfldclin.edu.

DANGEROUS COWS

By [Denise Grady](#)



James Estrin/The New York Times An Angus beef, left, and dairy cow in Harlemville, N.Y.

The image of cows as placid, gentle creatures is a city slicker's fantasy, judging from an article published by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), which reports that about 20 people a year are killed by cows in the United States. In some cases, the cows actually attack humans – ramming them, knocking them down, goring them, trampling them and kicking them in the head – resulting in fatal injuries to the head and chest.

Mother cows, like other animals, can be fiercely protective of their young, and dairy bulls, the report notes, are “especially possessive of their herd and occasionally disrupt feeding, cleaning, and milking routines.”

[The article, in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#), discusses 21 cases in which people were killed by cattle from 2003 to 2007 in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska.

In 16 cases, “the animal was deemed to have purposefully struck the victim,” the report states. In 5 other cases, people were crushed against walls or by gates shoved by the cattle. Ten of the attacks were by bulls, 6 by cows and 5 by “multiple cattle.” A third of the deaths were caused by animals that had been aggressive in the past.

All but one of the victims died from head or chest injuries; the last died after a cow knocked him down and a syringe in his pocket injected him with an antibiotic meant for the cow. In at least one case the animal attacked from behind, when the person wasn't looking. Older men with arthritis and hearing aids have the highest risk of being injured by livestock, the report says, probably because they don't hear the animals charging and can't move fast enough to get out of the way.

AGRABILITY CONCERNS: OUR FUTURE



AgrAbility is finishing-up its eighth year; April, 2010 will mark the end of the fourth year of the second grant cycle. With each cycle, the competition for the USDA grant increases. New States vie for the opportunity to join the AgrAbility Project. In addition, the USDA review panel more closely scrutinizes established Projects, determining whether those Projects are meeting the needs of farmers, following through with unique emphases, and seeking other financial means to support the Project. In the meantime, the size of the pool of grant money is shrinking. So this is an important year for us, as we will be submitting our re-application in December 2009 or January 2010. We will be seeking letters of support from our Rural Rehab Partnership and other agencies, with which we have worked. Testimonials from our clients will be gathered, framing our successes in serving our clients, and the diversity of the types of farmers we have served will be highlighted, as well. We will also underscore our involvement in addressing arthritis as a major disability concern, for many of Virginia's farmers, and our role as advocate in promoting quality healthcare services for rural Virginia. In terms of establishing other financial resources to serve our clients, we will point to the established Assistive Technology Fund at Easter Seals Virginia that is setup to specifically to serve AgrAbility clients. Because of that fund we have been able to provide effective services to a number of our clients that could not otherwise receive services from the Department of Rehabilitative Services or other sources. All in all, our progress over the years has been steady and effective in serving farmers and ranchers in Virginia with disabilities, injuries and illnesses. We are optimistic about our future. By the next time you receive the AgrAbility E-News, in early spring, we should be able to *tell* you our future! Wish us luck! Thanks. - *Kirk*

RURAL REHAB PARTENRSHIP UPDATES

- ❖ The **Virginia Rural Health Association (VRHA)** is involved in two big projects:
 - 1) Virginia State Rural Health Plan - <http://www.va-srhp.org/>. **Virginia's State Rural Health Plan (VA-SRHP)** is a 3-5 year strategic plan designed to strengthen the health care infrastructure in rural areas. The plan, which is led by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Office of Minority Health and Public Health Policy (OMHPHP) and the Virginia Rural Health Association (VRHA), is a collaborative effort of over 50 prominent partners who are dedicated to rural Virginia. **EVERYONE** is encouraged to provide input on the implementation of

the plan! For more information, please contact Beth O'Connor at boconnor@vcom.vt.edu

- 2) Check-out the op-ed piece by Beth O'Connor, Exec. Dir. of VRHA, on rural healthcare and giving-birth in rural Virginia:
<http://www.roanoke.com/editorials/commentary/wb/214558>
- ❖ **The Virginia Arthritis Action Coalition (VAAC)** The Virginia Arthritis Action Plan 2008-2012 will be available, soon, to be posted on websites of any interested agency. Information will be available in the next AgrAbility E-News.
- ❖ **Farm Bureau: Social Media Presence around Farm Bureau Campaign**
<http://saveourfood.org/Pages/default.aspx>., focusing on locally grown foods and where to find them.

LINKS OF INTEREST

- AgriWellness, Inc., The AgriWellness mission: promote accessible behavioral health services for underserved and at-risk populations affected by rural crisis in agricultural communities..
<http://www.agriwellness.org/>
- Going through a **farm transition** can be a tremendous source of stress. Family-business consultant, Dr. Don Jonovic, discussed this very topic at Successful Farming's Farmers for the Future Conference. He outlined four steps family farms should take in order to ensure a successful transition that keeps both the retiring and beginning farmers happy. Read more and watch a video of Dr. Jonovic explaining the steps:
<http://email.agriculture.com/cgi-bin17/DM/y/eBwuJ0K28Zc0BJx0I4VQ0GB>
- Farm Bureau; Local foods. <http://saveourfood.org/Pages/default.aspx>
- <http://www.Disabilitynavigator.org> a unique web resource created by and for people with disabilities and their families

DATES AND EVENTS TO NOTE

- **The Virginia Rural Summit, September 14-15, The Kirkley Conference Center, Lynchburg, VA.** Sponsored by the Virginia Rural Center, the Conference explores issues important to the quality of life in Rural Virginia
<http://www.cfrv.org/Register.Summit-09.htm>
- **The Virginia Rural Health Annual Conference, "Changing Times, Changing Strategies", November 15-17, The Homestead, Hot Springs, VA.** A joint

Conference with the Virginia Free Clinics, exploring health issues unique to Rural Virginia.

<http://www.va-srhp.org/2009-rural-health-summit.htm> (registration begins in early September)