

# AgrAbility Virginia



## **Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families**

AgrAbility Virginia is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Project # 02-01943) and administered by Virginia Tech University and Easter Seals Virginia. Virginia Cooperative Extension and Easter Seals Virginia programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, veteran status, national origin, disability, or political affiliation.

Equal opportunity / affirmative action employers.

## **E-News - Winter/Spring 2007**

**Contents: Annual Arthritis Summit; Workshop on “Serving Farmers: Unique Challenges, Unique Solutions”; Assistive Technology Recycling Summit II; AgrAbility Concerns... “Rural Health Issues”; Current Clients; VA Cooperative Extension *Toolbox* Mailing**

## **AgrAbility Virginia Invites You to Three Unique Events**

AgrAbility Virginia’s primary purpose is to “Promote Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families”. This commitment is to seek out resources and opportunities that will allow our clients to continue their agricultural way-of-life effectively and safely, and ultimately with an improved quality-of-life.

To support this primary commitment, AgrAbility is also committed to providing and supporting educational efforts for those who might be serving farmers and ranchers in Virginia. These people are the professionals, specialists, consultants, and even friends and family members who directly can affect the quality-of-life for a farmer or rancher with a disability. These are the Virginia Cooperative Extension agents; the counselors, engineers, and therapeutic specialists of the Department of Rehabilitative Services, Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center, and Centers for Independent Living; the doctors, therapists and educators of private agencies and institutions; the safety specialists of Farm Bureau; the variety of agricultural consultants with the USDA; and spouses, children, and other relatives. AgrAbility Virginia will be co-hosting two such educational events, one in May and the other in June, and participating in another in April (see highlighted sections that follow).

**The Virginia Arthritis Action Coalition** is a coalition of a number of agencies throughout Virginia dedicated to advancing treatments, therapies, education and

public policy regarding Virginians with arthritis. The coalition is an extension of the Chronic Disease Division of the Virginia Department of Public Health. *Because arthritis is such a prevalent issue for Virginians in agriculture, AgrAbility is a member of this dynamic Coalition.*

On Friday, May 11th, The VAAC will be hosting its second Annual Arthritis Summit: Living Well With Arthritis-You Can!, at the Marriott West Hotel Innsbrook, in Richmond. This summit offers a forum for up-to-date information and practices about arthritis, the most common chronic condition in America among older adults. The summit will offer two tracks, health care professionals and lay health care, recognizing that much of chronic care is in the hands of the family and friends of people who have many of the more than 100 conditions that fall under the umbrella of “arthritis.”

Summit topics will include Pharmacological Therapy, Dealing with Pain Management, Adapting Your Environment, Maintaining Healthy Joints, Managing Self-Healing Through Water, Fibromyalgia: The Invisible Arthritis, Breakthroughs in Joint Replacement Surgery, and much more. There will be exhibit tables, opportunities for questions and answers, and interactions with expert panels.

A key component of the Summit will be a talk and a town-meeting-like discussion at lunch time with Dr. Karen Funkenbusch, from the University of Missouri and AgrAbility Missouri. Karen’s specialty is rural health development and she has played an instrumental role in developing the statewide Arthritis Network in Missouri. Karen will also facilitate an informal discussion, at a dinner the evening before, for health professionals (separate registration).

For more information and registration information contact Mary Casebolt, at Mary Washington Hospital (540) 741-1751 or [mary.casebolt@medicorp.org](mailto:mary.casebolt@medicorp.org).

Another AgrAbility related event is a workshop entitled, Serving Disabled Farmers and Ranchers: Unique Challenges and Unique Solutions, to be held Friday, June 22, at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center in Fishersville, VA. This workshop is primarily geared towards occupational therapists and physical therapists who are likely to have disabled farmers or ranchers as clients. But it would still be of great benefit to any professional who works with this population.

The workshop is built upon the premise that a farmer's vocation and way-of-life are 2 sides of the same coin. And to effectively assist a disabled farmer in continuing his/her way-of-life/vocation an increased understanding of the farming culture and

that farmer's daily life is essential. The workshop will include presentations by professionals who work with farmers/ranchers, as well as an on-site visit to a local farm, and an opportunity to network with other professionals. This will be the inaugural offering of the workshop; AgrAbility hopes to be able offer it at future times in other parts of Virginia. For more information and registration information contact Kirk, @ AgrAbility Virginia, 540-777-7325 or [kballin@va.easterseals.com](mailto:kballin@va.easterseals.com).

## **Assistive Technology Recycling Summit II**

A follow-up to the initial and successful Summit on Assistive Technology Recycling last March is to be scheduled for the latter part of the summer, 2007. Sponsored by the Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) the goal of these ongoing summits is to establish a functioning network of regional locales where individuals may acquire necessary assistive technology at low cost or for reasonable rent. Ideally organizations and agencies will be able to assist their clients/customers in locating such AT equipment through an established database. This will be particularly of value given the increasing sophistication and cost of AT coming on the market. Stay tune for details, or for more information please contact Maureen Weyer at 540-231-4270 or [mweyer@vt.edu](mailto:mweyer@vt.edu) ([www.swvats.ada.vt.edu](http://www.swvats.ada.vt.edu)).



*AgrAbility Concerns.....*

### **Rural Health Issues**

Many of us live in urban and suburban environments; even those of us who serve and work with people who live in rural areas. So even though we might not be happy with the way the healthcare system works (or doesn't) we nonetheless have relatively easy access to doctors, hospitals, clinics, emergency rooms, etc., and we can be pretty much guaranteed that the type of healthcare we are seeking is available to us.

For a large percentage of people who live in rural areas, access to and quality of healthcare are not so guaranteed. In fact to see a doctor, or to go to a clinic,

hospital, emergency room, or to get any kind of specialized care, including mental health care, often requires extensive travel, waiting, and often insufficient care. Following up with appointments, or getting regular check-ups, which for many of us can be a nuisance but are doable, become a major burden of time and expense for people living in rural areas. This limited access to medical facilities and care is compounded by the lack of medical professionals willing to settle and serve in rural areas because of inadequate compensation and funding.

Part of the problem is that the general public is not aware of the unique nature of the crisis of medical care in rural areas. And subsequently without public pressure and concern legislators at the state and federal levels are not so motivated to address these serious problems. Legislation before the Virginia General Assembly, and budget allocations (or decrease thereof) being suggested at the Federal level will have major ramifications for the quality of rural health care for years to come. I strongly encourage you to educate yourself about these issues, and to let your representatives know how you feel about these issues.

For some background and education about current topics, some places to begin are: The Virginia Rural Health Association ([www.vrha.org](http://www.vrha.org)); The National Rural Health Association ([www.nrharural.org/advocacy/sub/approps.html/](http://www.nrharural.org/advocacy/sub/approps.html/)); Primary Practice Opportunities of Virginia ([www.ppova.org](http://www.ppova.org)); The Virginia Rural Health Resource Center ([www.vrhrc.org](http://www.vrhrc.org)).

Your participation in advocating for improved rural health care will be greatly appreciated by those of us who serve members of rural communities, but most of all by the many rural Virginians who have little opportunity to be heard, yet pay the price of its neglect.

**Thanks, Kirk Ballin**  
**Program Coordinator, AgrAbility Virginia**

**Next pages: Clients; Virginia Cooperative Extension Mailing**

## AgrAbility Clients



### Some of AgrAbility's ongoing clients include:

- ◆ **A vineyard manager who suffered a severe car accident this past summer and is having difficulty with the wide-range of demands put on him by the diverse nature of his job.** Assistance from the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) is the first step being explored.
- ◆ **A grain and cattle farmer with knee and other leg mobility challenges who has had difficulty accessing his grain bins, mounting/dismounting his tractors, operating his grain transport truck covers, and checking the fence line.** DRS is assisting him in addressing all of these issues, while AgrAbility investigates options.
- ◆ **A cattle and hay farmer who had a stroke that affected his left side and who has had difficulty mounting and dismounting his tractor, operating the clutch pedal, and accessing his work shed.** DRS is addressing these farm related issues as well as identifying assistive aids for inside the home.
- ◆ **A tree farmer with neuropathy, and who uses a wheelchair, needs to establish a safe and reliable means to mount and dismount his bulldozer and tractor. This will improve his mobility around his property and thereby enable him to have better access to his trees and improve his ability to manage them.** DRS is investigating a mobile step ladder to assist in the mounting/dismounting, while AgrAbility investigates options with regard to a versatile utility vehicle.
- ◆ **A cattle/horse farmer who suffered severe spinal deterioration that resulted in temporary paralysis and the removal of cervical vertebrae.** AgrAbility is assisting him with improving the condition of his farm, while exploring other income-farming options that will accommodate his abilities. He has been approved for an environmental grant from the USDA-Natural Resources and Conservation Services (NRCS) to assist in fencing and land use and will be working closely with his local Cooperative Extension office.
- ◆ **A lifelong farming woman who is now a double leg-amputee due to diabetes (uses a wheelchair) and resides at a Health and Rehabilitation Center.** She is still a VERY passionate gardener, and AgrAbility, in consultation with the New River Blue Ridge Independent Living Center and Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center staff, is planning to

help her gardening effort continue to be a safe and productive one. Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners of the New River Valley will also be assisting.

- ◆ **A hog farmer with extensive arthritis in his hands, knees, and spine.** He has had difficulty mounting and dismounting his tractors as well as accessing his grain to feed his hogs. DRS will be making adaptations to the tractors to facilitate mounting/dismounting. Accessibility and reduction of stress in feeding the hogs is to be further investigated.

## **BNG –*Toolbox* CD Mailing to Virginia Cooperative Extension Offices**

In early March all Virginia Cooperative Extension offices throughout Virginia will receive a free copy of Breaking New Ground's (BNG) recently updated CD version of its *Toolbox* reference manual (Purdue University). This reference source is a unique compilation of assistive technology/adaptations that have been used for a variety of situations in assisting farmers and ranchers throughout the U.S. With a grant from the NEC Foundation, BNG has made these available to AgrAbility Projects, at no cost to the Projects. These resources will be shipped to Extension offices throughout the U.S. Our thanks to BNG! *Toolbox* CD information available at:

[http://pasture.ecn.purdue.edu/~agenhtml/ABE/Extension/BNG/cd\\_ad](http://pasture.ecn.purdue.edu/~agenhtml/ABE/Extension/BNG/cd_ad)



**AgrAbility Virginia, 201 East Main St., Salem, VA 24153; 540-777-7325 x 123  
kballin@va.easterseals.com www.agrability.ext.vt.edu**