



CONSENSUS CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AMERICA

SUMMARY REPORT

The Consensus Conference on Disability in Agriculture and Rural America was held in Washington, DC on May 21-22, 2002. Two-dozen national organizations and federal agencies representing agriculture, disability, and rural health and development interests participated in a discussion of the disability-related challenges confronting individuals, families, and communities. Conference participants developed strategies for addressing these challenges and initiated planning of specific action steps for supporting people with disabilities in agriculture and rural community life.

Several of the organizations represented at the consensus conference have already taken action. Newsletter and newspaper articles have been published to raise awareness among American Farm Bureau Federation and Women in Farm Economics (WIFE) members of the involvement of people with disabilities in agriculture and issues which they, their families, and communities face. Within days of the consensus conference, the Director of Communications for the National Grange joined Tennessee AgrAbility Project staff on a visit to a Tennessee farm to see first-hand the accommodations that one farmer with a disability had made to his equipment, operations, and environment. Additionally, National AgrAbility Project staff have been approached about participating in a number of national conferences and membership meetings to make presentations about farming with a disabilities and program efforts to assist people with disabilities to succeed in agricultural production and rural community life.

The organizations that participated in the consensus conference identified strategies for addressing challenges confronting people with disabilities at the individual, family and community levels. Participants discussed potential action steps on strategies that fall into three categories.

- Immediate organizational issues/actions/solutions that align with organizational goals and capacity, the organization will implement the strategy immediately.
- Future organizational issues/actions/solutions that are consistent with organizational goals and capacity, the organization will pursue the strategy as an individual organization.
- Future multi-organizational issues/actions/solutions that are considered worthwhile for organizations to address collaboratively, small groups will be formed and charged with developing appropriate strategies.

IMMEDIATE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS
(May - July 2002)

<u>Title</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
AgrAbility Client Farm Visit	National Grange	National Grange representative visited Tennessee AgrAbility Project client.	June 2002
Membership Communication	All	Mailing, Flyer, E-Mail	Throughout 2002
Publications & Media Spots	Chestnut Health System/ADM	Article in employee newsletter	March/April 2002
	Farm Bureau	Article in member newsletter	June 2002
	National AgrAbility Project	Article in staff Newsletter (AgrAbility NEWS)	June 2002
	WIFE	Articles in three local newspapers and the WIFE members newsletter	July 2002
		Five Minutes Radio Station KCLI	July 2002
Website Link to National AgrAbility Project	RTC: Rural	Link to AgrAbility on RTC: Rural Website in place	Complete

FUTURE ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS

<u>Title</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
AgrAbility Presentations	Farm Bureau	AgrAbility presentation at Exhibitor session AFBF Annual Convention in Tampa, FL	January 2003
		AgrAbility presentation at the Young Farmers & Ranchers Farm Bureau Conference in Hershey, PA (tentative)	February 2003
		AgrAbility presentation at the Farm Bureau State Safety Directors meeting in Mississippi	April 2003
	WIFE	AgrAbility presentation at WIFE Annual Board of Directors meeting in Clewiston, Florida	January 2003
Connect to AgrAbility	Farm Bureau	Connect local Farm Bureaus to state AgrAbility Projects	December 2002
Education	Farm Bureau	Provide conference facilities and technology for distance learning in Washington, DC; Parkridge, IL; and state facilities	Throughout 2003
National AgrAbility Project Training Workshop	Chestnut Health System/ADM	Chestnut Health System/ADM representatives will attend NAP Workshop Nashville, TN	October 2002
Peer Support	Farm Bureau	Tap membership to match farmers with disabilities needing assistance with those willing to help	Throughout 2003

Policy & Program Development	RTC: Rural	AgrAbility Representative to participate in symposium on economic and small business development in rural America	May 2003
Publications & Media Spots	Chestnut Health System/ADM	Article in employee newsletter	March/April 2003
	National Grange	Article in organization newsletter	September 2002
Training	Chestnut Health System/ADM	Develop and provide training for service providers focusing on secondary conditions (depression, pain, chemical dependency)	January 2003 (tentative beginning)
		Potential use of ADM space and technology for training	Throughout 2003 (tentative)
Website Link to National AgrAbility Project	Chestnut Health System/ADM	Add National AgrAbility Project website link to Archer Daniels Midland website	October 2002
	Farm Bureau	Add National AgrAbility Project website link to Farm Bureau website	September 2002
	FFA	Add National AgrAbility Project website link to FFA website	September 2002
	Pioneer Hi-Bred International	Add National AgrAbility Project website link to Pioneer Hi-Bred website	October 2002
	WIFE	Add National AgrAbility Project website link to WIFE website	January 2003

Websites to National AgrAbility Project	National AgrAbility Project	Send e-mail with html links for Consensus Conference Participant websites to state AgrAbility Projects	September 2002
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FUTURE MULTI-ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS BY PARTICIPANTS
(Small Groups)

<u>Title</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
Community Awareness	WIFE	Promote disability awareness and community acceptance	April 2003
Community Resources	WIFE	Conduct community disability resource inventory and make plans to address gaps	April 2003
Direct Assistance	WIFE	Organize direct assistance for people with disabilities (e.g., "Home Repair Week")	April 2003
Training	Chestnut Health System/ADM	Collaborate with disability organization for service provider training	October 2003

Conference participants endorsed the idea of meeting again to further develop strategies for supporting people with disabilities in agriculture and rural community life. Approaches for next steps include a large group gathering that enables other interested national organizations and government agencies to join the dialogue, as well opportunities for small groups of interested organizations and agencies to convene to discuss specific issues of mutual concern and develop

targeted strategies and plans of action. The National AgrAbility Project committed to serve as a clearinghouse and catalyst for this next round of activity. Easter Seals committed to support these activities as well.

Conference participants acknowledged the leadership and support of the following sponsoring organizations that provided financial support for the conference: American Corn Growers Association, Archer Daniels Midland Company, Easter Seals, and Pioneer Hi-Bred International. The Farm Foundation was recognized for its leadership in joining with the National AgrAbility Project and Easter Seals in conceiving and conducting the conference. See attached list for the organizations and agencies that participated in the consensus conference.

CONSENSUS ON KEY ISSUES

Conference participants benefited from information presented by several disability, agricultural, and rural issue experts, as well from ideas and experiences they shared with each other throughout the conference. Consensus emerged over the realities which people with disabilities who work in agriculture and live in rural areas face. Among those realities identified were obstacles to earning a reasonable living in agricultural production; declining rural and farm populations; gaps in local health, social, and other essential services; limited opportunities for education and employment; lack of understanding and acceptance of disability; and, problems with accessibility at home and in the community.

Conference participants considered challenges, resources, and potential solution strategies for each of three perspectives: individual, family, and community. In each instance, the ultimate goal was to envision and achieve full inclusion and success for people with disabilities in agricultural work and rural community life. Highlights of the discussion in each area follow.

INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

- Individual - focusing on the impact of disability on an individual and on the associated needs, challenges, resources, and strategies for intervention that primarily target and benefit the individual.

The vision for individuals with disabilities seeking to work in agriculture and participate fully in rural community life was characterized as a future free of barriers, with few injuries, without stigma around disability, and in which each person is empowered to take control of his or her life. Universal access to affordable, integrated health care and special services, community resources, assistive technology, and high-speed Internet service was envisioned. Increased opportunity to be productive and earn a profit through farming, with greater support from corporations, government (e.g., tax incentives) was part of the vision as well.

Participants characterized the impact of disability on an individual level as instigating a loss of purpose, self-esteem, income, and control over activities of daily living, career goals, and personal independence. They associated the presence of disability with physical and emotional pain, and a sense of guilt. Observations about the current state for individuals with disabilities working in agriculture and living in rural areas were both environmental, (e.g., fragmented services, lack of transportation, health insurance, funding) and personal, (e.g., feeling invincible, lacking knowledge of potentially useful services and technology).

Many forces are driving the goal of full inclusion and success in agricultural work. These include:

- Increased awareness among individuals with disabilities and society at large that people with disabilities seek inclusion, self-determination, and independence. Implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, transportation, and public accommodations, and AgrAbility Project outreach;
- A strong work ethic, values, and personal determination of farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers to work to support their families and communities;
- Improved health care, disease prevention, and occupational safety allows more people with disabilities to survive disabling injuries and illnesses to continue in agricultural production, increased emphasis on farm safety and training;
- Increased access to program services, knowledge, and expert advice helping people with disabilities work in agriculture and explore alternatives within agriculture; and
- Increased access to information and assistive technology.

Forces restraining the ability of individuals with disabilities to achieve their desired goals of working in agriculture and living independently in rural communities were identified and ranked by conference participants. The three top-ranked restraining forces were those identified as both most in need of resolution and most possible for the participants to control. These included:

- Lack of awareness about disability and people with disabilities working in agriculture;
- Inadequate number of service providers trained to work effectively with farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers with disabilities; and
- Inadequate funding for needed health and social services, and education.

Other restraining forces were identified, including the strained agricultural economy, geographic isolation and distance of many rural residents from services, and a tradition of self-reliance and pride of farm community that creates reluctance to seek assistance. In an effort to better understand and initiate steps to jointly address challenges confronting agricultural producers with disabilities, conference participants selected one restraining force as the focus for discussion and solution strategy development. The restraining force (*in italics*), and a summary of the discussion and proposed solution strategies follow.

Lack of trained service providers to work with farmers and ranchers with disabilities.

Root causes for this restraining force were founded in insufficient supply of qualified professionals to work with agricultural producers with disabilities. Compared with their urban counterparts, rural professionals have lower salaries, few if any colleagues or opportunities for professional development, limited access to specialized equipment, and travel and work hours longer hours. Potential solutions fell into three categories: (a) leveraging urban resources more effectively by encouraging development of limited liability corporations that are regional in scope and cover urban and non-urban areas; (b) developing continuing education and supports for rural providers by adding sections on farming and disability to professional education curricula and by organizing community-sponsored tuition-payment programs for students, particularly local students, who agree to practice in the rural community after graduation; and (c) recruiting and retaining rural service providers by adding rural issues to education curricula, establishing rural practicum and internship opportunities, offering tuition assistance and other

incentives, increasing opportunities to train and use para-professionals and community members (EMT-model), and enhancing in-service education through distance learning and regional training.

FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

- Family - focusing on the impact of disability on the family and on the associated needs, challenges, resources, and strategies for intervention that primarily target and benefit the individual in the context of family, one or more family members, or the family as a whole.

Conference participants unanimously acknowledged the strain that farm and ranch families face in the current environment. With financial and emotional resources “stretched so thin,” participants recognized that the introduction of disability in a family could be the final factor that “pushes them over the edge” and out of farming as a way of life.

The vision for the families of people with disabilities seeking to succeed in agriculture and to participate fully in rural community life was characterized as a future in which they have access to essential support, including respite services, assistive technology, tax incentives, training, and replacement workers to help with farm and ranch work.

Participants characterized the impact of disability on the family as one requiring adjustment to a profound change in expectations for family member roles and responsibilities, financial security, and the future – the ability to continue in farming as a way of life. Families coping with a sudden and unexpected disabling condition were seen as highly stressed and shaken in their image of themselves as a family, with hurt spread across all family members. The current state of these families was identified as “determined to get by,” with well-defined roles based on gender, age, and relationships. At the same time, families were seen as increasingly leaving rural areas, having fewer children, experiencing more divorce, and working off the farm. They were viewed as lacking information and personal resources, such as health insurance, that are critical to accommodating the presence of disability.

Many forces are driving the families of people with disabilities towards supporting the goal of full inclusion and success in agricultural work. These include:

- A strong family commitment and loyalty to meeting the needs and supporting the expectations and dreams of family members with disabilities;
- Inadequate alternative sources of support for people with disabilities in rural areas means an emphasis on family members as primary caregivers;
- Growing understanding that people with disabilities can work in agricultural production, as promoted by AgrAbility Project, Farm Bill, and other programs; and
- Growing access to universal design in products, equipment, and buildings and increasingly affordable technology.

Forces restraining the ability of families of individuals with disabilities to help them achieve their desired goal of working in agriculture and living independently in rural communities were identified and ranked by conference participants. The two top-ranked restraining forces were those identified as both most in need of resolution and most possible for the participants to control. These included:

- Failure of support systems to adequately recognize and address the impact of disability on the family, and
- Lack of a system for providing long-term assistance with farm operations to compensate for capacity lost to disability.

Other restraining forces identified were economic challenges (family finances and income), lack of cooperation between family farms, and internal and external definitions of farm family roles.

In an effort to better understand and initiate steps to jointly address challenges confronting families, conference participants selected one restraining force as the focus for discussion and solution strategy development. The restraining force (in italics), and a summary of the discussion and proposed solution strategies follow.

Lack of a system for providing long-term assistance with farm operations to compensate for the capacity lost to disability.

Root causes for this restraining force were founded in insufficient access to labor to conduct necessary production operations arising from fewer children, family members unavailable to pitch in due to other work or school activities, neighbors unable or unwilling to help, lack of money to hire help, and an inadequate supply of migrant and seasonal workers. Another set of root causes dealt with a perceived insensitivity to the need for assistance among farmers and ranchers with disabilities, and insufficient technical assistance to facilitate the accommodation of disability in agriculture. Four categories of potential solutions were identified: (a) labor, including paid and non-paid assistance involving students, farm volunteer corps, and an adopt-a-farm program; (b) education, including the production of a documentary film to increase awareness of the problem, increased family counseling, and training on role transition within families to accommodate disability; (c) technology, including increased application of telemedicine, creation of a virtual farm resource to educate families on possible disability accommodations, a prize for robotics that benefit disabled agricultural producers, and enhanced access to local maintenance and repair of farm-related assistive technology; and (d) financial resources, including an adopt-a-farm model and tax incentives designed to increase income to farm families affected by disability. Deployment of these strategies would begin through organizations involved in the conference.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

- Community - focusing on the impact of disability on the community and on the associated needs, challenges, resources, and strategies for intervention that occur at the community level.

The vision for a community that supports individuals with disabilities seeking to work in agriculture and participate fully in rural community life was characterized as a future in which the community is prosperous and economically viable, free of physical and attitudinal barriers, embracing of neighborliness, and imbued with a sense of local ownership and responsiveness to problems and problem-solving. Ideally, communities would demonstrate full knowledge of issues affecting people with disabilities and their families and offer immediate access to needed services. Overall, rural issues would be seen and addressed as national issues.

Participants saw the impact of disability on the community as another cause of migration as people with disabilities and their families left for places offering needed services, accessible transportation, and opportunities for employment and education. Community awareness of disability was seen as a catalyst for assessing awareness, accessibility, and the availability of financial and service supports. Most rural communities, however, were thought currently to lack sufficient understanding, sensitivity, key service providers, transportation, or leadership necessary to address the needs of local residents with disabilities.

Many forces are driving communities to consider and support local residents with disabilities in achieving full inclusion in the community and success in agricultural work. These include:

- Heightened awareness among people with disabilities of having options and opportunities to lead their lives the way they want, often supported by the advocacy of family members and others;
- Government guarantees, protections, and programs support equality and opportunity for people with disabilities, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Rehabilitation Act, and Social Security; and
- A rural population becoming more political and mobilizing grassroots efforts to affect change.

Forces restraining the ability of communities to help individuals with disabilities achieve their desired goal of working in agriculture and promote full participation in community life were identified and ranked by conference participants. The five top-ranked restraining forces were those identified as both most in need of resolution and most possible for the participants to control. These included:

- Lack of a common vision for understanding and addressing disability-related challenges at the community level, which undermines priority-setting, coordination of existing resources, and new resource development;
- Rural communities resist solving problems collectively due to priority placed on autonomy and turf protection;
- Rural residents are not sufficiently informed or organized to effectively advocate for solutions to community problems;
- Insufficient access to public health and specialized health services; and
- Competing priorities that limit public investment in solving problems facing rural communities.

In an effort to get underneath challenges affecting communities relative to disability, conference participants selected two restraining forces (in italics), and a summary of the discussion and proposed solution strategies follow.

Lack of community resource sharing as a means of helping people with disabilities.

Extensive brainstorming identified numerous factors that were seen as crucial to success in bringing about community resource sharing to benefit people with disabilities in three critical areas: coordination and planning, awareness, and incentives. To be effective in the rural community environment, participants suggested that a respected local individual be recruited to

coordinate this activity with local leaders and decision-makers. Another key person would need to serve as a spokesperson. An inventory of existing resources and resource needs would have to be conducted as a starting point, best practices in and beyond the community should be identified and shared, and incentives for involving community residents in solving disability-related problems should be implemented. Liability and funding issues would need to be considered and addressed to eliminate barriers to resource sharing and to support achievement of resource goals. Deployment strategies for the group included: create and disseminate best practices, engage organizations, and identify a facilitator to help advance this solution strategy.

Lack of community acceptance and support for people with disabilities.

Extensive brainstorming identified numerous factors that would promote community acceptance of persons with disabilities, including a town meeting on the disability issues, sensitivity training of community residents, newspaper profiles of local people with disabilities, and awareness campaign activities. People with disabilities should be recruited to help plan and stage events, and a “home repair and safety week” promoting improved home accessibility and safety was proposed. Awareness and fundraising goals were combined under the banner of a “Corn on the Curb Cut” main street fair featuring disability education, accessibility tours, food, entertainment, and fun. Deployment strategies included identification of common interests and missions to facilitate involvement of churches, 4-H, and others in building disability awareness and acceptance. Activities could include building on AgrAbility Program services; disseminating information via newsletters, web sites, kits; engaging community ambassadors (spokespersons); and promoting partnerships between local residents with and without disabilities to solve problems and provide leadership.

For more information call Carol Maus at 800-914-4424 or email cmaus@opa.easter-seals.org.