



**Fred**, a cattle farmer from rural Virginia was referred to AgrAbility in 2003 by his cousin who works for DRS. At that time, Fred had undergone back surgery for nerve damage and was restricted by his physician to lifting less than 25 pounds. With over 100 head of beef cattle and 150 acres to manage, his medical limitations presented some challenges. Prior to our initial assessment, the client had identified two major concerns: (1) hooking up his PTO shaft from the baler to the tractor, and (2) manually operating a head gate when working with his herd.

An assessment was completed and several more areas of concern were identified. These included:

- feed storage (currently, 50 + pound bags are stacked on the floor of a shed)
- hauling (the client's cattle trailer uses a hand-operated jack)
- fatigue (standing for long periods is painful on his workshop's cement floor)
- communication (the client is using a cell phone but signal availability varies across the farm).



The PTO link-up problem previously identified continued to be a real source of frustration, but by the end of the visit a number of possible solutions had been generated. Two ideas proved worthwhile: first, that a stationary cradle-type holder for the shaft would prevent him from unnecessarily mounting and dismounting the tractor repeatedly. Secondly, the DRS counselor suggested that a cylinder could be inserted to the lower bars of the three-point-hitch, enabling the client to maneuver the PTO shaft onto the tractor with less stress to the farmer's injured back. During the meeting, the operation of the

head gate was examined and a reasonable alternative was demonstrated by the Farm Bureau representative.

At the conclusion of the assessment, the goals identified by the team were:

- To increase the client's ability to complete farm tasks independently by using technology and assistive devices, so as to minimize the amount of physical force.
- To investigate communication devices that will provide a measure of safety while in remote areas of the farm.
- To provide information related to farming with a back injury and to educate the client about proper body mechanics with the goal to prevent secondary injuries.

Since the initial assessment, AgrAbility staff have shared information relating to the goals identified and concerns of the client through mailings, telephone conversations, and email.

Types of materials shared include:

Technology/AT Devices:

- Feed carts and lift tables (foot pedal/electric/air-hydraulic)
- Electric trailer motors to adjust the height of the trailer jack automatically
- Floor cushioning mats for the cement-floored workshop

Communication Devices:

2-way radios with large mileage ranges, capable of covering the farm entirely.

Medical literature:

- Farming with a back injury tip sheet
- Proper lifting techniques printout

This client continues to face medical treatment for his back condition; he recently underwent another surgery for a compressed nerve and is in the healing process.