

AgrAbility Virginia

AGRABILITY PROJECT



AgrAbility Helps Farmers and Ranchers Create Solutions that Change Their Lives!

In June 2002, Silas Shelburne, a southwestern Virginia beef and tobacco farmer, was having a little fun jumping on a trampoline with his three children. The fun, however, ended abruptly when Shelburne fell off the trampoline and sustained a crush injury to his C4/C5 vertebrae.

After the incident, Shelburne spent over three months in the hospital and rehabilitation facility. Shelburne first learned about the AgrAbility program from his counselor at the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). The staff at the Virginia AgrAbility Project had heard about the incident and had planned to contact him.

In December 2002, Renee Bond,

rehabilitation specialist at the Virginia AgrAbility Project, met with Shelburne to learn about his farm and discuss his hopes and plans for continuing the operation. Shelburne's farm has been in his family for three generations. The operation consists of over 100 acres of hay and seven acres of tobacco.

In addition to the crops, he has a cow/calf operation of nearly 80 head. Shelburne's family also owns the last tobacco auction warehouse in Virginia where live auctions are conducted October through January each year.

During the first visit, Shelburne indicated he would like to continue farming and was interested in learning how to use a computer to keep the farm books.



Mr. Shelburne pauses for a smile on his farm in Southwest Virginia.

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Success through Partnership

We've all heard the phrase "two heads is better than one". With AgrAbility Virginia, several heads are better than one. For one person to accomplish the mission of AgrAbility, they would need expertise in all types of disabilities, assistive technology, and all as-

pects of agriculture. It is only with the expertise of the Rural Rehabilitation Partnership that AgrAbility Virginia is successful. AgrAbility staff members work with individuals from Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Assistive Technology Systems, Centers for

Independent Living, Department of Rehabilitative Services, and Virginia Farm Bureau Safety. Each organization contributes in their specialty area and together create a unique, agriculture-specific program for people with disabilities.

Department of Rehabilitative Services



Larry Overbay, CRC
Southeast Region

The Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) is the state agency that provides and advocates for the highest quality of services to help persons with disabilities maximize their employment, independence and full inclusion into society. Through its 5 regional offices and 38 field offices, DRS provides a comprehensive array of services including vocational counseling/career exploration, job development/training, assistive technology, and other

specialty programs that meet individual needs, interests and abilities. For employers, DRS' Business Services program offers assistance in staffing, job analysis, job accommodation, disability awareness training, and other services that help companies bring skilled and qualified persons with disabilities into their workforce. Lastly, DRS works in partnership with the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VDBVI), Department

for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDHH), the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), local One-Stop Centers, and through a variety of community outreach programs to provide a collaborative system of quality service for Virginians with disabilities.

To learn more about DRS, call 1-800-552-5019 (voice), 1-800-464-9950 (TTY) or visit www.vadrs.org.

Partner Highlight: Blue Ridge Independent Living Center

Blue Ridge Independent Living Center is open Monday—Friday from 8:15—4:30. For further information, contact the center at 540-342-1231

The Blue Ridge Independent Living Center is a private, nonprofit corporation founded in 1989. The Center assists individuals with disabilities throughout the Fifth Planning District to be independent and works with the community to ensure it is accessible to all. Fifty-one percent of the

Board of Directors must be people with disabilities and the majority of the staff are also people with disabilities. Services provided to individuals include peer counseling, independent living skills training, information and referral, and advocacy. In addition, the Center also provides assistance with housing and personal assis-

tance services. Community services include community education, systems advocacy, and technical assistance. The Center also provides Benefits, Planning, Assistance, and Outreach to individuals who are receiving disability benefits and would like to return to work or work additional hours.

National Therapeutic Recreation Week July 6-12



Can you still hunt after you lose an arm? What about snowskiing after losing a leg? Absolutely! "Therapeutic Recreation is the provision of Treatment Services and the provision of Recreation Services to persons with ill-

nesses or disabling conditions..."(American Therapeutic Recreation Association).

For further information regarding recreation therapy programs, please call Virginia Therapeutic Recreation Association at 757-683-4703.

Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center also offers Therapeutic Recreation. You may reach them at 1-800-345-WWRC extension 27085.

Partner Highlight: Virginia Farm Bureau Safety

Virginia Farm Bureau (VFB) Safety is a part of the Underwriting Department of Virginia Farm Bureau Insurance Services and serves as a resource for Virginia Farm Bureau Federation members by promoting safety on farms, in homes, and on the road. In addition, VFB Safety administers several programs that prevent insurance losses and create avenues for purchasing low-cost safety products.

Programs that reduce losses include: Fire extinguishers placed on large harvesting equipment, farm safety inspections, dry hydrant installation and maintenance, teen driver savings bond incentive, farm tractor rollover protective structure incentive, fourth grade fire safety education, and more.

Since 1994, VFB Safety has documented farm work related fatalities that had

largely gone unpublished in the past and, in response, conducted educational presentations that are designed to help reduce the risk of death or serious injury. "Keeping safety in front of our Farm Bureau members is what it's all about" says Bruce Stone, safety manager. "We believe that people have to constantly be reminded of safe practices and how quickly their lives can change if they make a mistake."

To learn more about Virginia Farm Bureau Safety or other programs, go on-line to www.vafb.com and click on *Farm/Home Safety*. Or e-mail us at vfbsafety@vafb.com. Or call 1-800-290-1376

Shelburne, continued

Prior to the incident, Shelburne used a logbook and did all the farm finances and management by hand. DRS provided funding for a computer, workstation, and Quadjoy. The Quadjoy allows Shelburne to move the computer cursor and type on-screen. At this point, Bond brought in Shelburne's cooperative extension agent, Daniel Osborne. Together, Osborne and Bond worked with Shelburne on various farm management computer software programs. "Both Renee and Daniel have really been a great help figuring everything out," according to Shelburne.

Shelburne says, "I've really come a long way in a year. I owe some of that to my friends and family who have helped along the way." Shelburne's four sisters and his mother have helped out a lot.

Also, several friends and family helped make home modifications so that he could return home. Shelburne's two sons, aged 16 and 18, have helped out a lot on the farm. His eldest son, TJ, plans to pursue a degree in agriculture or forestry this fall at college.

Future plans for modifications to the operation include adding a sidewalk from the home to Shelburne's shop and several of the tobacco greenhouses to make it easier to navigate the terrain. Shelburne currently uses an electronic wheelchair, but still finds it difficult to get around.

He recently purchased a Kawasaki Mule and with help has modified it so he and another person can ride in it. This provides him access to many of his fields and pastures. Bond did discuss with him the importance of having a

voice-activated communication device with him at all times, in case he needs assistance when he is out in the fields and pastures. Shelburne's ultimate goal is to get back on the trac-

According to Bond, "I've really enjoyed working with Silas. It's fun to work with someone who wants to get back on the tractor and continue farming!"



Mr. Shelburne and his son, TJ, in the modified Kawasaki Mule

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We're on the web!
www.agrability.ext.vt.edu

“Promoting success in agriculture for people with disabilities and their families.”



AgrAbility Endorses National Safety Month

Blacksburg, VA. Agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations in the United States. The National Safety Council reports that in 2001, 700 people working in agriculture died and 130,000 more sustained disabling injuries. Each year, tens of thousands more become disabled as a result of non-farm injuries, illnesses, other health conditions, and the aging process. The AgrAbility Project was created in 1990 to assist people with disabilities who are employed in agriculture.

“Providing farmers, ranchers, and farm workers with disability or chronic health condition information about safety is one way our staff

works to achieve a major project goal—helping those who have one disability avoid sustaining another,” according to Amanda Johnson, AgrAbility Virginia Program Coordinator.

“We provide a range of no-cost assistance to farmers, ranchers, and farm workers who have disabilities,” Amanda Johnson stated. “This assistance may include information on how to accommodate their disabilities and maintain their rural lifestyle by determining whether to restructure the way they run their operations or to modify their equipment and/or structures.

Farmers, ranchers, and farm workers with any type of physical, cognitive, or sensory condition that limits their ability to do their agricultural work or activities of daily living are eligible for AgrAbility services.

USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service currently funds a National AgrAbility Project and 24 State Projects. AgrAbility is a joint effort between Virginia Tech and Easter Seals Virginia. Since 1991, AgrAbility projects nationwide have provided assistance and accessibility solutions to over 11,000 farmers, ranchers, farm workers, and their families.