

# AgrAbility Virginia



Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families<sup>1</sup>

## E-News - Summer/Fall 2008

**Contents: Featured Clients; Small Tractor Lift and Grant; Important Rural Healthcare Initiatives; Safety Around Large Animals; Tractor Safety Initiative; The NewWell Fund; Virginia Wounded Warrior Summit ; Assistive Technology Events; AgrAbility Concerns: Quality of Life ; Misc. AgrAbility; Other Links of Interest: Alcohol and Injury; Tractor Safety; Events and Dates to Note**

### **FEATURED CLIENTS: OBADIAH and JEAN ANNE**



**OBADIAH NEXT TO HIS FEED DISPENSER**

---

<sup>1</sup> **AgrAbility Virginia** is funded in part by the Cooperative State, Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), under special project number 2006-41590-03436 and administered by Virginia Tech 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.

Obadiah is a seventy-five-year-old poultry farmer and cattle rancher in Southampton County. He raises up to 40,000 chickens per growth cycle for Purdue, and around 20 head of cattle. Obadiah suffered the loss of his two outer digits on his left hand from a chicken-house fan accident. He has also dealt with a previous stroke, coronary issues, and arthritis all of which have contributed to limiting his mobility, strength, and stamina. Doing his daily farm work and maintenance had become very difficult and unsafe for Obadiah. Joe Young, AgrAbility Service Coordinator, met Obadiah at a VSU agricultural event. A meeting was setup to do a site-assessment. This meeting included Obadiah, Joe Young and Kirk Ballin from AgrAbility, and Darrick Cladd, with Virginia State University Cooperative Extension. It was determined that Obadiah needed assistance in finding an easier and safer way to feed his chickens, as well as to facilitate his tractor mounting and dismounting. Obadiah was connected with counselor Dolores Heisler at the Department of Rehabilitative Services. A DRS assessment was made and DRS Engineer Tom Rybak and DRS Occupational Therapist John Allen evaluated Obadiah's needs. Consequently, automatic feeding systems were installed, allowing easier distribution of feed, and tractor steps were installed to assist Obadiah in the use of one of his tractors. Joe (AgrAbility) was also instrumental in getting Obadiah to sign up for the No-Till program with Natural Resources and Conservation Services, through agent Yamika Stokes in the Southampton County Office, to grow corn, soybeans, and wheat.



**JEAN ANNE AND THE FRUITS OF HER LABOR**

Jean Anne lives in a small house in a neighborhood in Augusta County that borders farm land and developments; not your typical agriculturalist/horticulturalist work site. Nevertheless, in her backyard Jean Anne has raised large ornamental gourds and herbs to be sold in local Farmers' Markets - until a debilitating back injury and subsequent depression changed all that. The back injury limited her mobility, and the depression seriously diminished her motivation even to go out of the house. It was at a rare occasion when Jean Anne was at a sporting event for one of her children that a conversation with AgrAbility Service Coordinator Steve Bridge led to AgrAbility working with Jean Anne. Over the course of several months through use of AgrAbility/Easter Seals AT Funds, donated materials, labor by Steve, and with assistance from Jean Anne's son, two new gourd arbors were built, as well as a raised bed for herbs and a plant transfer table. A local church group built a ramp and walkway to accommodate Jean Anne's walker, and donated mulch was laid down to facilitate easier navigation around the gourd arbors and raised bed. Although there is still work to be done for the next growing season, Jean Anne's new motivation and commitment along with AgrAbility's assistance have produced a healthy batch of gourds! Jean Anne has also dramatically reduced her medications, and savors the opportunity to get out and work with her son in reclaiming her passion for cultivation.

## TRACTOR LIFT AND EASTER SEALS/SODEXO GRANT

Most tractor lifts for farmers who use wheel chairs are made for large tractors – and they're expensive. Many farmers have devised their own systems, some more effective than others, but none are officially approved for human use. Moreover, often such farmers rely on family members or friends to “boost” them into the tractor seat. Obviously, safety is a major concern for these farmers. Dr Robert “Bobby” Grisso, with Biological Engineering at Virginia Tech, and the Project Director for AgrAbility Virginia, along with some of his VT colleagues, is working on developing a simple, low-cost tractor lift approved for human use. To that affect, AgrAbility was able to acquire \$1000.00 from the Sodexo / Easter Seals National Assistive Technology Grant. These funds will be used in the development of this lift. An AgrAbility client in Augusta County has already been identified as the test-case user of this planned lift.

## IMPORTANT RURAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

The **Virginia Rural Health Association (VRHA)** is in the middle of 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!
- 2) VRHA's Annual Conference - <http://www.vrha.org/08Conference.html>. This year we have chosen to focus on the Virginia State Rural Health Plan. Topics include *Improving Dental Health Access, Innovations in Using Mid-Level Providers, Technology in Rural Areas* and will feature keynote speakers Dr. Arthur Garson and Carolyn L. Engelhard who will talk about the current state of the health care system, using their book, *Health Care Half-Truths: Too Many Myths, Not Enough Realities*, as a guide. They will then analyze the most pressing issues within our health care system in relation to the health care platform of the newly elected President. **We invite everyone to explore issues within rural health Workforce, Access, Quality and Data with us!**

For more information, please contact Beth O'Connor at [boconnor@vcom.vt.edu](mailto:boconnor@vcom.vt.edu)

## ***SAFETY AROUND LARGE ANIMALS***

- Always protect yourself by wearing proper personal protective equipment: gloves, steel toe boots, long pants and shirt, helmet, etc.
- Wash your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with flowing warm water and soap after touching an animal. How long is 20 seconds? Sing “Happy Birthday” or the “alphabet song (abcs)” to yourself once at a regular pace.

### **Facts**

- Animal-related injuries include about 40 percent of all farming injuries in youth up to age 19.
- Animals are a factor in nearly one out of every eight reported injuries, regard less of the victim’s age.
- Animals often have a strong territorial instinct and may react unexpectedly if removed from that area.
- Lighting and shadow changes can easily excite or spook them.
- Animals are easily frightened by loud and sudden noises.
- Beef and dairy cattle as well as swine are colorblind and have poor depth perception causing sensitivity to lighting contrasts, movement, and noises.
- Cattle and horses can see everything around them except directly behind their hindquarters.
- Horses and mules tend to kick toward their hindquarters.
- Livestock with young offspring have a strong maternal instinct and tend to be very defensive and difficult to handle.
- Animals often become defensive when cornered about their environment or people with that environment and may act aggressively to protect themselves.

### **Injury/Illness Prevention**

- Always have an exit between you and the animals and be aware of this exit at all times; this is especially important when working in close quarters, with sick or injured animals, or under strange conditions (unusual territory, severe storms, etc).
- Always use restraining equipment and know how to use it properly.
- Avoid startling an animal by moving in a calm and predictable manner; do not make sudden or loud movements and noises.
- Keep children and visitors away from animal handling areas.
- Never approach an animal from its blind spot.
- Animals can be unpredictable; be aware of their usual behaviors and note any changes.
- Keep all equipment and gates in good condition.
- Exercise patience when working with animals; getting angry and yelling will only stress and agitate the animal and may cause defensive behavior.

References: Gerberich, S.G., et al. Injuries among children and youth in farm households: regional rural Injury study. *Injury Prevention*. June 2001; 7(2): 117-22. <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/>  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd> <http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/agristok.htm>  
<http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/agristok.htm>

## ***THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL TRACTOR SAFETY INITIATIVE***

The [National Agricultural Tractor Safety Initiative](#) is now online! Read personal accounts from farmers, find out about some local campaigns that are helping to keep farmers safer on their tractors, and learn about the most recent tractor safety research. You can also access resources to help you or your organization become a partner in tractor safety.

Activities to reduce deaths from tractor overturns in the US began in the 1930s with the development of Rollover Protective Structures (ROPS). The 1985 voluntary ROPS standard developed by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers called for most new tractors to have ROPS, but didn't address the two million tractors already in the US without ROPS. While there were several successful local tractor injury intervention programs, there was no sustained or coordinated national program for education and behavior change. The National Agricultural Tractor Safety Initiative builds upon previous efforts in the United States to develop policies in support of reducing tractor injuries and fatalities. These include the Tractor Risk Abatement and Control (TRAC) committee's national TRAC Policy Conference held at the University of Iowa in 1997 and the 1988 report Agriculture at Risk: A Report to the Nation.

## ***THE NEWWELL FUND***

Originally established as the Assistive Technology Loan Fund Authority over 10 years ago, the NewWell Fund is a low interest loan program for Virginians with disabilities that need help in purchasing assistive technology. The Fund is gaining greater attention all the time, especially as folks realize the importance technology can have in the lives of people with various disabilities.

When assistive technology is placed in the life of a person with a disability in the form of a power chair, ramp, tractor lift, hearing aid, magnifier, door opener, prosthetics, etc., it becomes an essential part of life. It is a necessity for daily living, and often removes a barrier that keeps someone from being more independent. These devices help persons go through or around a barrier that has kept them back. Increased independence then leads to new opportunities and new forms of assistive technology.

Unfortunately, people sometimes have a problem paying for the devices they need. Most will purchase these devices themselves, and incur financial risk or go without other life necessities. Given these difficult financial times, creative funding options are needed.

The NewWell Fund offers affordable loans to creditworthy Virginians for assistive devices and services that enhance their independence and community life. There is no minimum loan amount, and qualified applicants can borrow as much as \$50,000. There are even equipment loans for qualified disabled Virginians wanting to start a business from home, or are teleworking at home for a business. Please call Christy at 804-662-9000 or contact your Center for Independent Living for more information. The NewWell Fund prides itself on friendly customer service. We would love to work with you. – Joey Wallace, Director. [www.newwellfund.org](http://www.newwellfund.org)

## **THE VIRGINIA WOUNDED WARRIOR PROGRAM**

A very informative and insightful summit focusing on issues related to care for injured Virginia veterans from the Iraqi and Afghanistan military arenas is to be held at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center. The following is an announcement from Catherine Wilson, with the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program:

As the new Executive Director of the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, it gives me great pleasure to announce an upcoming two-day educational summit on **November 6-7, 2008**. **This conference, "Painting a Moving Train," will focus on the recognition, treatment, rehabilitation and support for our veterans who experience combat related stress or traumatic brain injury.** The training is designed for behavioral healthcare and brain injury services professionals who want to learn how to apply their existing clinical skills to their work with veterans and their families. We will hear from clinical experts, veterans, veteran's family members and others who are working to improve the availability and access to behavioral healthcare and brain injury services for our veterans and their families. I'll also have an opportunity to brief you on funding that the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program received from the General Assembly that will become available in early 2009. **The conference will be held at the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center in Fishersville** along with several remote sites throughout the state.

It is my hope that you will be able to join us in November and that you'll help us spread the word about this exciting conference. Sincere thanks for all you do every day to support our veterans and their families. I look forward to meeting you. -- Catherine A. Wilson, Executive Director, Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, Department of Veterans Services, (804) 371-8431 <http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/woundedwarrior/>

## **SW VIRGINIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SYSTEM EVENTS**

The Virginia Assistive Technology System Southwest Regional Site at Virginia Tech (SW VATS) will be co-sponsoring two October events. All day on **Monday, October 20, 2008**, ADA Services is planning activities at Virginia Tech's Torgersen Museum and Assistive Technologies Research Lab in Torgersen Hall. The activities are part of Disability Awareness in Employment Month set by the U.S. Department of Labor.

In addition to the annual award program, the day will also feature vendor demonstrations and displays. So far, the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services Center, Inc. and the Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment & Endowment (FREE) are displaying in the Museum.

In the Assistive Technologies Research Lab, Jerry N. Marindin, Freedom Scientific and Moira E. Williams, Envision Technology, Inc. will demonstrate their company's products designed for people with vision impairments and those that are blind. We hope to have consumers and their caregivers attend the vendor presentations. The Assistive Technologies Research Lab staff along with SW VATS will demonstrate assistive technology (AT) devices and software.

On Thursday, **October 30, 2008** at the Assistive Technologies Research Lab in Torgersen Hall, from 8:30 a.m. until 10:00 a.m., the Training & Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC) at Virginia Tech and the Virginia Assistive Technology System Southwest Regional Site at Virginia Tech (SW VATS) will be hosting teachers.

As part of a statewide initiative, a representative from Don Johnston, Inc., Bob Keller will demonstrate the software “READ: OutLoud,” described as “The Accessible Text Reader that Strengthens Comprehension.”

John Eisenberg, Vice-Chair of Virginia Assistive Technology System Advisory Council and Co-Director of the Accessible Instructional Materials Center of Virginia (AIM-VA) facilitated securing no-cost READ: OutLoud packages for all VATS Regional Sites.

For more information on these events, please email Rick Barrow, SW VATS Site Coordinator, [rbarrow@vt.edu](mailto:rbarrow@vt.edu).

---

### *AgrAbility Concerns..... Quality of Life*



Quality of Life. This is a popular buzz phrase these days, and a critical and explicitly stated intent of many Federal and State programs, i.e. to impact on the quality of life of the people whom a program serves. This is no less the case with AgrAbility. It is our goal to improve the quality of life of the clients we serve, by assisting them in being able to effectively and safely continue to pursue their agricultural/horticultural interests. Yet as with all such programs seeking to improve the quality of life of an individual or a family, measuring quality of life changes is not so simple and straightforward. These days it is outcome measurements that are the foundation of an assessment of a program, and the subsequent continued funding of that program. However, quality of life changes are not so easily pigeon holed into the structured categories of an outcome measurement tool; quality of life changes are not necessarily automatic consequences of successes measured by outcome measurement tools. In other words, quality of life is really a state of mind, and the degree to which our efforts at AgrAbility affect a client’s state of mind, i.e., how he/she feels and thinks about his/her life, is not something that is easily ascertained. In fact, there are those in AgrAbility projects who would argue that our role is simply to address the pragmatic. In other words, our job is not to be concerned about the quality of life of a client but rather simply to address the technical challenges a client faces. To what extent that affects a client’s quality of life should not be our concern. For me, however, it is the knowing that whatever intervention we have made, as AgrAbility, into a client’s life, has left that client with an increased sense of empowerment and purpose; this is what ultimately matters. And I want some way of knowing that. Currently, AgrAbility Virginia is part of a group of four AgrAbility Projects that is test-driving a Quality of Life Survey that we hope will provide this way of knowing what impact we have had on the lives of our clients. It is the McGill Quality of Life Survey, which has pre and post surveys. Its benefits are yet to be documented, as the group has only been using both surveys for just a few months. But even the insight the pre-surveys have provided regarding some clients has been noteworthy; what a client presents in person and what he/she may really be feeling and thinking about his/her situation as presented in the survey can stand in stark contrast. Therefore, I am optimistic that this Quality of Life tool will eventually assist us in providing life-changing services to our clients.

**Thanks, Kirk Ballin**  
**Program Coordinator**  
**AgrAbility Virginia<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>2</sup> AgrAbility Virginia, 201 East Main St., Salem, VA 24153; 540-777-7325 x 123  
[kballin@va.easterseals.com](mailto:kballin@va.easterseals.com) [www.agrability.ext.vt.edu](http://www.agrability.ext.vt.edu)

## MISCELLANEOUS AGRABILITY NEWS

- The National AgrAbility Project serves as a clearing house of information and resources for the State AgrAbility Projects. It also provides programming and curriculums for State Projects, including the organizing of the National AgrAbility Workshop. For the past several years, the National AgrAbility Project has been located at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin. Like the State Projects, the National Project is funded by a competitive grant from the USDA. This year that grant has been awarded to Purdue University in Indiana. An official announcement is to be made soon.
- AgrAbility Virginia has a **new, client-centered brochure!** This brochure features four AgrAbility clients and their stories of success with AgrAbility. We hope it will give a clearer understanding of the work we do and how we might be of help to prospective clients. If you wish to receive a PDF version of the brochure, or wish for us to mail one/some to you, please let us know: [kballin@va.easterseals.com](mailto:kballin@va.easterseals.com)

## OTHER LINKS OF INTEREST

- A recent Virginia report on the relationship of **Alcohol and Injury** is available at: <http://www.vahealth.org/civp/Alcohol%20Report.pdf> . Also, the website for the Virginia Injury and Violence Prevention Division is: [www.vahealth.org/civp](http://www.vahealth.org/civp)
- Tractor Safety Initiative. A teenage victim of a PTO accident takes on tractor safety: <http://depts.washington.edu/trsafety/>

## DATES AND EVENTS TO NOTE

- **SW VATS, Disability Awareness, October 20, 2008**, Virginia Tech. Contact Rick Barrow, [rbarrow@vt.edu](mailto:rbarrow@vt.edu)
- **SW VATS, "READ: OutLoud" Demonstration, October 30, 2008**, Virginia Tech. Contact Rick Barrow, [rbarrow@vt.edu](mailto:rbarrow@vt.edu)
- **Virginia Rural Health Association Annual Meeting, November 6-7, 2008**, Stonewall Jackson Hotel, Staunton Virginia. For details and for presentations from 2007 Annual Meeting, and to register, go to [www.vrha.org](http://www.vrha.org) .
- **Virginia Wounded Warrior Summit, November 6-7, 2008**, Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center. For more information go to: <http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/woundedwarrior/>
- **National AgrAbility Workshop, November 10-13, 2008**, Wichita, Kansas