

AgrAbility Virginia



Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families¹

E-News - Winter/Spring 2008

Contents: Featured Client; Current Clients; Rural Rehab Partnership Reconnection Meeting; Cancer and Staying Healthy on the Farm; Caregiving in Rural America; Safety and Corral Design; AgrAbility Concerns: Shifting Options; Other Links of Interest: Populations in Rural Counties; Broadband in Rural America; The Pros and Cons of Bio-Energy; Health and Wellness Survey; Arthritis and Farming; Farmer's Lung; Respiratory Protection; Events and Dates to Note

FEATURED CLIENT: BOBBY JONES



BOBBY JONES and JOE YOUNG (AGRABILITY STAFF)

Bobby Jones is a beef cattle farmer in Chesapeake County. Along with his wife and their son, Bobby owns and operates 179 acres, and an additional 300 rented acres, and raises about 250 head of cattle. In February of 2006, Bobby was out in the field alone when his shirtsleeve became

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entangled with his tractor's PTO (power take off). With his left arm, he made an effort to extract his right arm from the PTO, but his left arm became entangled as well. The injuries resulted in the amputation of his right arm above the elbow, and nerve damage to his left arm. Bobby was hospitalized for several months and contracted further complications while in the hospital. When he was finally discharged, rehabilitative therapy followed until October 2007, when insurance coverage ended. Bobby re-gained some strength in his left hand and arm, but not to the degree needed to do normal farm work. Medicare paid for prosthesis for his right arm; this device was provided by Tidewater Prosthetic Center.

Adjusting to the use of and finding a comfortable fitting for the prosthetic has been a slow process for Bobby, but modifications are being made to the point where he can begin to use it more effectively.

Bobby has several large tractors, two combines, and several small tractors. As is the case with many Virginia farmers, Bobby's equipment and machinery are not new; they do not have many of the modern features new models have, thereby making the use of his machinery more difficult.

The Department of Rehabilitative Services' occupational therapist and rehab engineer are in the process of determining exactly how to assist Bobby. This assistance will likely include modified hand controls and steps on his tractors, a hand bar on the hydraulic controls, and easy snap on/snap off hydraulic hose connections. Once those improvements are made, additional assists and modifications will be determined.

CURRENT CLIENTS

AgrAbility's current clients include 13 individuals in 10 counties:

- Two poultry farmers: one with finger amputations on right hand, heart disease; one with Compartmental Exercise Syndrome, financial challenges
- Five beef cattle farmers: one with Multiple Sclerosis/Rheumatoid Arthritis; one with complete blindness; one paraplegic; one with hand amputation/arthritis/hip replacement; one with right arm amputation/left arm nerve damage.
- Two goat farmers: one paraplegic; one completely blind
- Two aspiring ranchers: one quadriplegic with partial use of left arm/hand (horses); one paraplegic (buffalo).
- One herbalist and gourd grower with back injuries/occasional depression
- One vineyard manager with back injuries.

RURAL REHAB PARTNERSHIP RECONNECTS

On December 3, 2007 the Rural Rehab Partnership, which serves as a support network and resource for AgrAbility Virginia, held its Annual Reconnection Meeting at Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation. The meeting was attended by: **Karen Frazier**, Blue Ridge (New River) Center for Independent Living (CIL); **Beth O'Connor**, Virginia Rural Health Association (VRHA); **Bunny Caro-Justin**, Virginia Department of Health, Chronic Disease-Virginia Arthritis Action Coalition (VAAC); **Linda Meyer**, Woodrow Wilson Rehab Center; **Margaret Gillispie**, Department of Rehabilitation Services; **Bobby Grisso**, Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension - AgrAbility; **John Perumpral**, Virginia Tech-AgrAbility; **Bill Holbach**, Virginia Tech, Assistive Technology; **Steve Bridge**, Easter Seals-AgrAbility; **Joe Young**, Easter Seals- AgrAbility; and

Kirk Ballin, Easter Seals-AgrAbility. Representatives of the Virginia Assistive Technology System/DRS were unable to attend.

The purpose of the meeting was to re-establish person-to-person connections between members of the Partnership. The members of the Partnership already participate in a monthly conference call to review AgrAbility clients and to share information of mutual interest. These annual gatherings establish rapport and improve communication and understanding between the Partnership members. The success of AgrAbility Virginia is highly dependent upon the effective and efficient services and information provided by the agencies represented by the Partnership.

Some pertinent points and issues that came out of the meeting were:

- WWRC and DRS are most likely to provide actual direct services to AgrAbility clients, with an occasional referral. CILs have provided referrals, but also have the potential to be involved in providing direct service with a home assessment and recommendations. VRHA provides informational resources and advocacy with regard to rural health issues that impact AgrAbility clients. VAAC is a mutually beneficial effort at the State level that provides resources and opportunities for addressing the prevalence of arthritis in Virginia. AgrAbility will continue to be a key partner in VAAC in addressing arthritis related issues in Virginia. AgrAbility provides a client-based component to addressing arthritis as a major health issue in the rural population in Virginia.
- Over 50% of AgrAbility clients identify arthritis as a factor of their disability issues. Virginia Tech – AgrAbility has posted the extension factsheet entitled “Arthritis and Farming” at <http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/ageng/442-083/442-083.html>
- The results of the Virginia Tech Virginia Farmers Health and Wellness Survey hopefully will be published, soon. Until then it is posted on the web (see Other Links of Interest below) As a follow-up to that survey, Bobby Grisso and John Perumpral mentioned the need to look at depression/suicide as concerns, as well as medication issues and needing more information about medication interactions.
- The concerns about funding constraints and rising costs were noted as impediments to providing services. This is particularly of concern with regard to working with DRS. The Order of Selection imposed upon DRS in selecting clients has a direct effect on the number of AgrAbility clients who can receive direct services from DRS – at least in a timely fashion. Previous AgrAbility clients who have received DRS services would not meet the current criteria for the Order of Selection. This is a direct consequence of State budget constraints.
- A sampling of PowerPoint Presentations in the Rehabilitating Farmers and Ranchers With Disabilities was shared. This AgrAbility program is geared towards Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists, and any other therapeutic professionals who work with disabled farmers. However, as a shortened and tailored program, it is also an excellent resource for educating any audience about Farm Culture, Farm Safety, and the unique challenges of farmers and ranchers with disabilities.
- AgrAbility Virginia is available to do educational presentations of any length for any interested group
- Inserting information about AgrAbility into agency trainings and communications was also noted as a helpful way of increasing awareness about AgrAbility’s services.

CANCER AND STAYING HEALTHY ON THE FARM

(Excerpted from the Iowa Farmer Today, “Farming Poses Special Health Hazards, Benefits”, by Hannah Fletcher)

“...There are about 10 cancers for which the farming population is at an increased risk for,” says Kelly Donham, director for Iowa’s Center for Agricultural Safety (I-CASH). “These cancers are not typically common cancers.”

There are various blood cancers: leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma. Other conditions include: soft-tissue sarcoma, prostate cancer, stomach cancer, brain cancer, testicular cancer, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

With some of these cancers, the connection is “fully clear” between farming and their increased rates, Donham says. Skin cancer, for example, is caused by chronic sun exposure, a result of farmers’ increased activity outdoors. Donham says farmers are more likely to get certain types of skin cancer, basal cell and squamous cell, which are typically not as life-threatening as melanoma. Also, most agree soft-tissue sarcoma and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma have been linked to use of 2, 4-D and 2,4,5-T, and other gas-derived herbicides. “These are still used today but not nearly so much,” he says.

Other diseases have weak associations that suggest pesticide or herbicide use increases the risk for farmers, Donham says. For example, brain cancer has been linked to perpetual insecticide and pesticide use. Prostate cancer has been linked to pesticides that contain methol bromide, which fumigates grain or acts as a soil sterliant. And, it has been hypothesized Atrazine use combined with nitrates that are often present in rural water produces nitrosomonas that could increase stomach cancer risks.

It is sometimes hard to find connections between certain cancers and farming because there is not a specific source.

“Another problem is it takes years for these cancers to develop,” Donham says.

Although safety technology and education have improved, some respiratory disease incidences might be on the rise, particularly for people involved in animal agriculture, says Dr. Steve Kirkhorn, medical director for the Farm Medical Center at Marshfield Clinic in Marshfield, WI. “They have much more increased exposure to dust and gases,” he says.

It is hard to keep track of the number of incidences because there is no Workers’ Compensation in agriculture, Kirkhorn says. But, respiratory diseases such as farmer’s lung, silos-filler’s disease, asthma and chronic bronchitis are a concern

Farmer’s lung (see factsheet under links below) is an allergic disease that usually caused by breathing in dust from moldy hay, and silo-filler’s disease is a chemical pneumonitis caused by exposure to oxides of nitrogen from plant material in silos or storage. While many tractor cabs are equipped with air filters, there are not filters for those in animal agriculture, he says.

Also, agriculture is stressful, which can lead to a host of mental problems that should not be overlooked, Kirkhorn says. “Generally, the farming population is not much different in terms of health patterns but some conditions are based on environmental or occupational differences,” Donham says.

Even so, it is not all doom and gloom for farmers’ health — they are actually healthier than the general public, the experts point out. “Overall, farmers’ health profile is good,” Donham says

Farmers have lowered risks for common diseases than the general population, such as heart disease — Americans’ No. 1 killer. They have lower overall cancer rates primarily because they have a lower incidence for some major cancers, such as lung cancer, he says.

Donham hypothesizes farmer health status might be due to a number of healthy lifestyle differences, compared with the broader population: Generally,

- farmers get more exercise;
- farmers are less likely to smoke, which greatly lowers the incidence of lung cancer and other conditions;
- some long-term studies and Body Mass Index data show farmers have a lower rate of obesity; and
- some evidence suggests the ag population might have more healthful dietary habits, such as less simple sugars, less saturated fats and, perhaps, more fruits and vegetables.

Experts say efforts to stay healthy on the farm are a good business move.

“Loss of work days are expensive and so hard to replace,” Kirkhorn says.

Donham and I-CASH continue to work on a program that trains rural health care providers and encourages farmers to register their farms as an AgriSafe farm. The AgriSafe program certifies farms that meet on-site safety evaluations and encourages routine physicals.

Program coordinators are working with insurance companies to get discounted insurance for these AgriSafe farms. Certification is a useful guide for the farmers and potentially cuts expensive, hazardous situations for insurance companies and the operation, Donham says.

“We’re hoping the insurance benefit will make safety and health a value-added product on the farm,” he says.

CAREGIVING IN RURAL AMERICA

Family caregiving (when a family member or family friend is responsible for providing care of another family member) in the United States today is emerging as a major policy issue. A staggering \$306 billion per year is the estimated value of care provided by family members and friends of children and adults with chronic health conditions and disabilities. More than one in five adults in the U.S. -- 44.4 million people -- provides unpaid care to an adult aged 18 years or older. And another 6 million people provide care to a child with a disability. These family caregivers live in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the country. Although many of their needs are similar, **caregivers living in rural areas face unique challenges** -- whether they are providing assistance for a parent, spouse, family member, friend, or neighbor. For AgrAbility, a client with a disability from an accident, disease or simply from aging, often requires the assistance of family members and friends for work assistance and for healthcare needs. The physical, emotional, and financial stress and strain, as a result of the disability, are not limited to the client. Services are often needed to assist the caretakers.

Together, the National Alliance for Caregiving and Easter Seals have produced a report, [Caregiving in Rural America](http://www.easterseals.com/site/DocServer/Caregiving_in_Rural-compressed.pdf?docID=50643) (pdf)

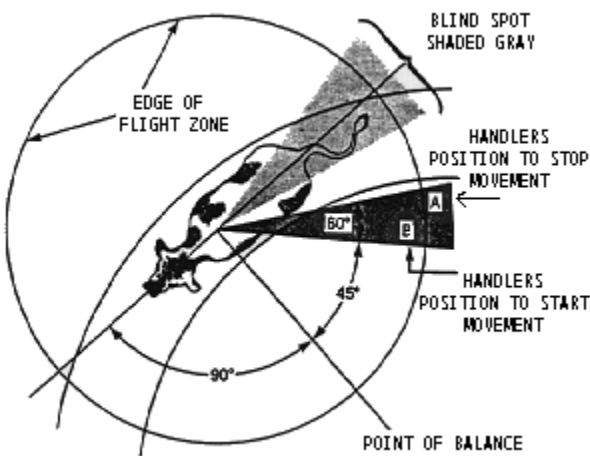
http://www.easterseals.com/site/DocServer/Caregiving_in_Rural-compressed.pdf?docID=50643
or (text-only pdf)

http://www.easterseals.com/site/DocServer/CAREGIVING_IN_RURAL_AMERICA_text.pdf?docID=54443 to bring to light and support the demand to address the ever-increasing numbers and unmet needs of rural caregivers.

Consider Safety of Animals and Operator in Corral Design

Cattle have a flight zone (the personal space they will not permit anyone to enter). The size of the zone can vary from animal to animal.

As you try to enter this zone, cattle will move away to keep you out of the zone. However, if you enter the zone too quickly, the animal may charge toward you. Knowing about flight zones can be useful, especially when moving cattle.



CIRCLE MOVEMENT

Take advantage of certain known cattle characteristics when moving them. For example, cows have a natural tendency to move in a circle. Using that knowledge in the design of a corral can lead to an arrangement that is safer for the animals and operator. One reason cattle move in a circle is that they are looking for other herd members. Another reason is they are turning to see what is going on behind them. Using natural circular movements then, makes for convenient flow.

VISION & HEARING

Cattle have nearly 360-degree panoramic vision. This means cattle can hold their heads straight ahead and still see all around – with the exception of directly below and behind the rear – without moving the head.

How about their hearing? High frequency, loud noises scare cattle. Gates banging, hydraulic controls, clanging headgates, barking dogs, cracking whips and screaming children are all examples of noises that scare them.

Eliminate as much noise as possible. Once the cattle are contained in a corral, the dogs should be kept out of sight and nowhere near the cattle. For safety sake, small children shouldn't be involved in rounding up or working the cattle through the handling facility.

Bright spots and shadows will also spook cattle. Moving them from bright sunlight into a dark barn, for example, will cause cattle to balk. Because of depth perception problems, they have difficulty judging distances.

Man-gates are a seldom-used feature that should be included in every facility plan. They offer greater safety to the operator by providing an easy escape path from charging cattle. Rather than climbing the fence or going all the way around, a man-gate built into the corral could be used.

NOISE REDUCTION

Take steps to eliminate as much noise as possible around the loading chute. The squeeze chute and scales, hydraulic controls and pumps could be located a short distance away from the squeeze rather than on top of it to reduce noise. A rubber cushion can be used between gates and posts to reduce clanging noises. A hazardous area for the operator is around the squeeze. Bystanders and the operator could be injured by the headgate, particularly one with hydraulic controls.

Guards around the headgate can prevent injuries. A solid, horizontally-sliding blocking gate between a palpation cage and the lead-up alley blocks the view of the next animal. It is easier to use and probably safer than raising a vertical sliding gate with a rope.

LOADOUT

Looking at loadout, it might be wise to provide separate loading for fifth wheel trailers. Ramping up 15 inches in 10 to 15 feet allows easier loading into a fifth wheel.

DVD is available at the Cattle Learning Center Web site: <http://www.cattlelearningcenter.com/>



AgrAbility Concerns.... Shifting Options



Farmers are used to shifting weather conditions and price fluctuations for their crops and livestock. It comes with the territory. But the consequences of climate changes and the “added value” market forces that are entirely new to agriculture have introduced shifts in choices that were not anticipated by many just ten years ago.

Dramatic climate shifts, whether due to natural cycles or due to human induced global warming, will determine what a farmer can produce in the years ahead. What has been the norm for

preceding generations may no longer be feasible or profitable with changing climates, different seasonal temperature variations, etc. Anticipating these shifts and planning for new options is a risky and anxious business.

The options of the types of crops and livestock being raised are also being determined by what the market is demanding and for what the purpose of the product is. The sudden surge of interest in crops (corn and soybean in particular) as a source of fuel has significantly redefined the value of these crops (see the link above on the pros/cons of this new value added part of these crops). With this added-value to these crops, markets have shifted, production has shifted, and the consequences of raising these crops have shifted. The uncertainties of meeting these newly added values could have dramatic effects on farmers' lives and their plans for the future.

Other value-added options are determining what many established small farmers and livestock growers and newly entering producers are doing. This is especially true in states like Virginia, where small, family farms are the norm. Specialty crops and meat products, such as organic produce, cut-flowers, goat meat/milk, organic beef and poultry, herbs, etc., are attempting to serve local markets and demands. This becomes a new option from the more traditional commodities and markets, but it also comes with fewer assurances of success and with increased risk, because they are ventures down an unexplored road.

I mention these factors of relatively new shifting options for farmers and ranchers because they affect everyone involved in agriculture, but especially affect our AgrAbility clients. AgrAbility clients are dealing with a multitude of shifts in their vocational lives and their personal lives because of the newly acquired disability or the ongoing disability that continues to influence their lives.

In some ways, the shifting options being determined by climate changes and value added factors are providing opportunities for AgrAbility clients to make changes in their plans that will accommodate their disabilities in positive ways. Nevertheless, the shifting options also create new challenges and risks for what the future holds.

Even more reason, AgrAbility has an important role to play as a resource and advocate for these farmers and ranchers.

**Thanks, Kirk Ballin
Program Coordinator
AgrAbility Virginia²**

OTHER LINKS OF INTEREST

http://wireless.fcc.gov/outreach/index.htm?job=broadband_home

The increase of broadband connections for rural residents has significant ramifications for farmers, from production, to healthcare.

<http://www.rupri.org/Forms/RUPRIagchairs.pdf>

The shifting populations of rural counties impacts on land use and employment.

(more next page)

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<http://email.agriculture.com/cgi-bin17/DM/y/eBXk20K28Zc0Gti0Ieu00Gu>
<http://email.agriculture.com/cgi-bin17/DM/y/eBXk20K28Zc0Gti0Ifej0Ga>

The recent boom in Bio-Energies has its supporters and detractors. Which way the wind blows will impact significantly on the types of farming we'll see in every agriculture state. Links offer the differing perspectives

http://filebox.vt.edu/users/rgrisso/Papers/Virginia_Survey.pdf

This is the posted version of the Virginia Tech/AgrAbility Health and Wellness Survey of Virginia farmers and ranchers. The journal publication is still under review, but the posted version provides an excellent snapshot of the health status/and challenges of Virginia farmers.

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/ageng/442-083/442-083.html>

“Arthritis and Farming,” VCE Factsheet, Publication Number 442-083, December 2007. The information presented here should not be used as a substitute for the advice and guidance that can be obtained from a physician. On the other hand, this information can be useful in giving you the background to have an intelligent discussion with your doctor about arthritis and a treatment plan. Considering that early diagnosis is extremely important in treating arthritis and minimizing its severity, individuals experiencing joint pain should consult with their family physician without delay.

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/bse/442-602/442-602.html>

“Farmer's Lung: Causes and Symptoms of Mold and Dust Induced Respiratory Illness,” VCE Factsheet, Publication number 442-602, Posted January 2005. This factsheet describes farmer's lung and causes of the disease.

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/bse/442-601/442-601.html>

“Respiratory Protection in Agriculture.” VCE Factsheet, Publication 442-601, Posted January 2005. This factsheet describes how to protect your health with proper respiratory protection. A key to protect those working in hazardous environments from farmer's lung.

DATES AND EVENTS TO NOTE

- **Arthritis Advocacy Summit.** February 25th-27th. Washington D.C. 202-887-1700
- **Outreach Conf. for Small Farmers and Community-Based Organizations.** Virginia State University, March 13, 2008. Free, but must register. 804-287-153/Farm Service Agency
- **Enabling Access: Gardening for the Disabled and Elderly.** Saturday, March 15, 2008 from 9am – 12 Noon. Topics include garden design adaptations; exercises, clothes and tools for the gardener; and plants to select. An interpreter for the hearing impaired will also be at this seminar. *Location:* Central Virginia Community College at the Bedford Center for Business, 1633 Venture Blvd., in Bedford. *Cost:* \$10; the fee will be collected at the door. Call (540) 586-7675 to register as space is limited.
- **Women in Agriculture.** Wednesday, April 9, 2008. Blue Ridge Community College, Weyers Cave, VA, 8am-4pm. Virginia Cooperative Extension, 540-432-6029. \$30 pre-registration. \$50 at the door.

- **2008 Beef Exposition-Rockingham County.** April 18-19, Rockingham County Fairgrounds. 540-992-5166
- **Craig County Farm Bureau Expo.** Craig County Fairgrounds, Castle Rock, VA. 10am-5pm. Free Admission.
- **Virginia Rural Health Association Annual Meeting.** Nov. 6-7, 2008. Go to www.vrha.org for details and for presentations from 2007 Annual Meeting.