

AgrAbility Virginia

Assisting Farmers and Farm Workers to Continue Working Safely and Productively with Dignity

E-NEWS – ISSUE NO. 2: 2017

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AV=AgrAbility Virginia; VT=Virginia Tech; ESUCP=Easter Seals UCP; VCE=Virginia Cooperative Extension.
The AgrAbility Virginia program is effectively administered in partnership with Virginia Tech, Easter Seals UCP, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. AgrAbility Virginia also works with Virginia's rehabilitation and agricultural service systems to increase our ability to provide direct assistance for farmers and farm workers.

FEATURED CLIENT

Billy Ray, Pulaski County



Before: Unable to reach steps

Modified Steps

One of the three handles

After: Back in the seat

Billy was initially referred to AgrAbility Virginia by Morgan Paulette, the Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources, in Pulaski County. Billy is 79 years old, has a small hay and horse boarding operation that he has been operating for many years, including when he was working as a machinist for a trucking company most of his adult life. As a teenager, while living in North Carolina, Billy contracted polio; he was severely impacted by the disease, spending much of his teenage years in bed. He eventually responded (and some might say “miraculously”) to therapy and

treatment to the point where he was able to gainfully work until his retirement from the trucking company with full disability. Many a person with his challenges would have bowed out of work many years before he did, but he continued to work his farm. Unfortunately, the past few years have seen a major resurgence of the polio. This post-polio condition has profoundly affected his legs, hampering his ability to walk, and most importantly to him, his ability to mount and dismount his John Deere tractor, upon which he was most dependent to run his hay operation. On our initial assessment, AgrAbility staff, Steve Bridge and Kirk Ballin, were concerned that anything could be done to his tractor that would allow him to safely mount and dismount his tractor. Although he seemed to have adequate upper body strength to pull himself up, his legs were extremely weak. After a couple of false starts with some adaptations made by a welder friend, Steve Bridge was able to recruit the assistance of Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services Rehab Engineer, Dave Law. Dave was able to fabricate and identify placement of appropriate handles and steps. Billy was able to mount, operate, and dismount his tractor for the first time in over a year! Mounting and dismounting still require a great deal of concentration and effort, and his wife, Pat, has to help guide his feet, once he is on the steps. Yet he can do it! The success of this story was dependent upon 4 things: 1) the will of Billy to do something that most people in his condition would never have contemplated; 2) the commitment of AgrAbility staff to do whatever we could to research options for Billy, while still being cognizant of the safety of Billy being primary; 3) a highly skilled and dedicated DARS Rehab Engineer (Dave Law) to provide the expertise to make it happen; and 4) a devoted and supportive spouse (Pat) who recognized Billy's need to continue to do what he loved: "It is so wonderful, and I am so thankful Bill is able to do this again!" says Pat. There is no guarantee as to how long Billy will be able to continue his work before the polio continues to worsen. We are hopeful he still has good days ahead of him.

REMEMBRANCE: ALVIN BLAHA

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of one of our clients and longtime friend of AgrAbility, Alvin Blaha, back in June. Alvin was featured in our 2016 E-news, but AgrAbility Virginia had worked with Alvin in past years. Alvin was a great champion of AgrAbility, a highly respected farmer, and a man who gave much back to his community. He is missed by many, and we continue to send our love and condolences to his wife, Nina, their daughter, Cindy, and their son, Eric.



AGRABILITY VIRGINIA PROGRAM EVALUATION

The AgrAbility Virginia Team recently created an evaluation of the AgrAbility Virginia program to assess how we are meeting our goals and addressing farmers' needs in Virginia. This is the first time such a formal evaluation tool has been designed and implemented for AgrAbility Virginia. The whole team came together to voice important parts of the program that each of us wanted to evaluate using an updated AgrAbility Virginia logic model. This resulted in the team compiling a survey tool. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Virginia Tech approved our survey. IRB is a committee that reviews and approves any kind of research involving human subjects to make sure that all people are being treated in accordance with federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines. Surveys were sent out to 52 current and former clients spanning five years. In November, we launched the survey via email and US postal mail

according to each client's preferred communication method. We are happy to share that the evaluation is going fairly well; however, we would be pleased to receive more feedback. After the surveys are collected and analyzed, we will report the results to all participants in a public report. The next step of the evaluation process will be to conduct interviews with willing participants. The interviews will be conducted as an opportunity to ask more in-depth questions about the experience participants have had with AgrAbility Virginia. The goal is to identify key areas that we need to improve on, as well as, recognize critical areas of that are working well. We are specifically concentrating on access to educational materials, connections to further assistance, and modification suggestions for farms and equipment. The priority is to ensure the program is completing the important work of assisting Virginia farmers to continue farming effectively, safely, and with dignity.

MAKING CONNECTIONS: 1890 LAND GRANT INSTITUTION WORKSHOP & NATIONAL SMALL FARM CONFERENCE

In conjunction with 1890 Land Grant Virginia State University, the National AgrAbility Project, and the USDA-NIFA, AgrAbility Virginia co-hosted a workshop in July 2016 aimed at introducing AgrAbility to other 1890 Universities (see www.1890universities.org) that might be interested in an



AgrAbility Virginia supports the safety, wellness, and quality of life of farmers and the farmworker community.



AgrAbility Project. Also in attendance were representatives from other 1890 Universities that already had AgrAbility Projects or worked with their State's AgrAbility Project. We are immensely grateful for the organization skills and hospitality of Virginia State University for hosting this successful event!

In August 2016, Virginia State University hosted the Seventh Annual Small Farm Conference in Virginia Beach, VA. Over six hundred attendees from all over the world participated in workshops, demonstrations, and lectures by a wide range of specialists, community educators, and food and farming system leaders. AgrAbility Virginia's Dr. Kim Niewolny served as co-chair of the Program Committee, while Program Coordinator, Kirk Ballin helped with Publicity. AgrAbility Virginia also took first prize in the Success Stories Poster competition!

Cultivating Hope through AgrAbility Virginia: An Emphasis on the Safety, Health, and Wellness of Farmers and Farmworkers

Kirk Ballin¹, Kim Niewolny, PhD², Crystal Kyle³, Steve Bridge⁴, Joe Young⁵, Don Ohanehi, PhD⁶, Tristan Robertson⁷
¹Easter Seals UCP/NCVA, ²Virginia Tech

Mission of AgrAbility Virginia

We support the safety, wellness, and quality of life of farmers and the farmworker community in Virginia.

AgrAbility Virginia uniquely integrates our statewide programming into Virginia's rehabilitation and agricultural service delivery system to increase organizational capacity and provide the best quality education and services for farmers.

Our programming includes:

- outreach and marketing
- education and capacity building
- technical assistance
- program evaluation

Priorities of AgrAbility Virginia

AgrAbility Virginia assesses individuals and their families who farm, and have illnesses, injuries or disabilities that are impeding their ability to work safely, effectively, and productively. It is essential to us that farmers and farm workers can begin and continue to farm with dignity and hope. Our priorities include:

- Improving access to appropriate assistive technology
- Increasing access to trusted information and educational resources for farmers and farmer families
- Providing targeted support for family caregivers
- Providing capacity building opportunities for professional educators to best support AgrAbility stakeholders

History of AgrAbility

The National AgrAbility Program (NAP) originated with 1990 Farm Bill. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides funding for state AgrAbility programs through a competitive grant process.

- In the year 2000, 18 state projects were funded
- By 2016, 21 funded state projects are in operation
- AgrAbility Virginia has provided services for over a decade

Success Stories






Cif Slade is a 62 year old retired U.S. military veteran farmer from Surry County, Virginia. He endured a range of ailments including muscle strain in his upper shoulder and neck and nerve damage in his right leg, preventing him with only 75% functioning capacity. Cif has had two back surgeries and must now wear a foot-drop prosthesis. He has trouble with lifting, walking, bending, stooping, and mounding and demounting his tractor.

1. AgrAbility Virginia referred him to the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) who assessed Cif's situation and recommended extending the handles on his hand tools.
2. DARS rehab engineers modified the wooden handles and attached mechanical aluminum tubing that extended the tool handles without decreasing the strength or significantly increasing the weight of the handles.
3. The aluminum tubing was provided by the Assistive Technology Fund of Easter Seals UCP.

Prior to the modifications, Cif was only able to work three beds now he can work four beds within the same timeframe. He says the modified tool handles have resulted in a 25% production increase and reduced pain.

Majdleh and Robert run a twenty-seven acre produce farm in Chesterfield County, Virginia. Majdleh is challenged by sciatic nerve problems in her lower back and degenerative disc disease, significant arthritis in her knees, and diabetes. Robert suffers from long-term nerve entrapment causing severe pain and arthritis in his left knee. For both Majdleh and Robert, slanting, squatting, lifting, and excessive sitting and walking are often very challenging. Because they lacked a gardening irrigation system, they needed to water their crops by hand and endured additional pain.

1. AgrAbility Virginia's Service Coordinators, Joe Young, was able to assist them in connecting with Virginia State University.
2. Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach program granted Robert and Majdleh a grant for a drip irrigation system that was installed by Virginia State.
3. AgrAbility Virginia also recommended that they purchase a rolling cart and hand tools to use while working their crops which will reduce the stress on their backs and knees.

With the support of AgrAbility's programming, Robert and Majdleh reported the garden care and irrigation system have increased their labor ability by 50%, and their produce production by 30%.



AgrAbility Virginia is funded by AgrAbility Project, USDA/NIFA Special Project 2014-2018 (41590-22326). It is administered by Virginia Tech, Easter Seals UCP, and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Programs and equipment are open to all, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, veteran status, national origin, disability, or political affiliation. Equal opportunity/affirmative action employers.

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AGRABILITY VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS

The AgrAbility Team of Dr. Kim Niewolny (VT), Don Ohanehi (VT), Crystal Kyle (VT), Kirk Ballin (AV), Tristan Robertson (ESUCP), Steve Bridge (AV), and Joe Young (AV), along with VT undergraduate student, Nicole Orndoff, published three resource documents for farmers and farm families through Virginia Cooperative Extension. These include: *A Resource Guide for Start-up Military Veteran Farmers*; *Mental Health Topics for Farm Families and Caregivers: An AgrAbility Virginia Program Resource*; and *The Basics of On-Farm Safety: An Introductory Guide by the AgrAbility Virginia Program*. All three are accessible through the AgrAbility Virginia website: <http://www.agrability.ext.vt.edu/publications/>.

MURPHY DEMING COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES PRACTICUM



L-R: Justin Bennett; Nicole Henry; Kirk Ballin; Katie Butler; Ruth Tart

The Mary Baldwin Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences is located in Fishersville, VA, not far from the Augusta Medical Center. The College was established in 2014 to offer Doctors of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy, Master of Science in Physician Assistant, and Registered Nurse to Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing. In the second year of the 3-year Doctor Programs, students are required to do a semester practicum with a professional agency that in some way is associated with physical or occupational therapy. AgrAbility has had the honor of participating in three semesters of the practicum studies. The four students (above) put together an excellent PowerPoint presentation for AgrAbility Virginia! This, along with the media packet and outlet contacts put together by the two previous Deming Teams, has given AgrAbility Virginia great tools to work with in promoting AgrAbility Virginia and educating providers and potential clients as well. To learn more about The Mary Baldwin Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences, visit: www.mbc.edu/health_sciences/about/

UPDATE FROM THE VIRGINIA BEGINNING FARMER & RANCHER COALITION

AgrAbility Virginia continues to partner with the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition (VBFRC) to help address the diversity of new and start-up farmer needs across the Commonwealth. The most recent collaboration between AgrAbility Virginia and the VBFRC centers on the creation of a state chapter of the **Farmer Veteran Coalition** (FVC). With leadership from southwest Virginia farmer and military veteran, and steering committee member of the VBFRC, John Fant, an action team of interested parties (including AgrAbility Virginia) is working to establish the state chapter of the FVC as a 501-(c3) organization dedicated to assisting veterans who wish to get into farming as a significant vocation. The process of becoming a Chapter requires adherence to certain procedures and protocols to ensure adequate training, guidance, and support for prospective veterans. With membership in the Chapter, veterans are able to receive a number of benefits and community support for successful and sustainable farm entry. To learn more about the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition and ways to connect, visit www.vabeginningfarmer.org or directly to the FVC State Chapter page at <http://vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/resources/Critical-Issues/VirginiaFVC.html>. This effort is partially funded through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Award Number: 2015-70017-22887.

THE NATIONAL AGRABILITY PROJECT GRANT AWARD

The USDA-NIFA has awarded the National AgrAbility Project (NAP) 4-year Grant Award to Purdue University. Purdue University has had this honor for the past four years, and will continue in this capacity, serving the State and Regional AgrAbility Projects (SRAPS) with programing, consultations, workshops, and other resources. www.agrability.org

THE NATIONAL AGRABILITY TRAINING WORKSHOP (NTW)

The next Annual National Training Workshop (NTW) is scheduled to take place in Knoxville, TN, March 20-23, 2017. This convergence of staff, farmers, service providers, agricultural experts, and others is a major source of education, networking, and collegial engagement for AgrAbility Projects and the clients they serve. Registration is expected to be available towards the end of January 2017, but you can stay informed by going to www.agrability.org.

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA RURAL REHAB PARTNER NEWS

AgrAbility Virginia partners with other agencies and providers who offer their input and guidance on our work. One of those partners is The Virginia Rural Health Association (VRHA), Beth O'Connor, Executive Director. VRHA has been awarded a HRSA Rural Health Network Development Planning Grant to create a Rural Health Telecommunications Consortium for Virginia. VRHA will use the grant to support the creation of the Virginia Rural Health Telecommunications Consortium (VRHTC). The consortium would draw down federal funds to improve health information technology applications in rural communities. The Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) fosters the development and growth of broadband healthcare networks. Successfully applying for the HCF would reduce prices for higher bandwidth and offer better connectivity for rural healthcare providers. Filing for the RHCP as a consortium would allow for continuity within the application process; a consortium would encourage competitive bidding by telecommunications providers across the state, resulting in lower fees for the participating consortium members; consortia can access funds not available to individual participants in the RHCP, including upfront payments for equipment and healthcare provider constructed facilities, and funds for equipment necessary to manage a dedicated healthcare broadband network. Participating facilities can receive up to 65% off their

telecommunications services. VRHA is encouraging all hospitals, FQHC, RHC, other clinics, SNFs, CSBs, and Schools of Nursing to complete the eligibility form so VRHA can determine needs and gauge interest in the consortium. VRHA encourages interested parties to complete the survey even if they do not think they will join the consortium, as VRHA will also use this information to compile a report for the Secretary of Technology. Take the survey:

<https://fs30.formsite.com/boconnor/form28/index.html>

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA ADVISORY GROUP

The AgrAbility Virginia (AV) Advisory Group, which serves to assist the AgrAbility Virginia Program by providing guidance on marketing, networking, and education aims has met twice in 2016. The first time was a face-to-face meeting held at the Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) in the spring, and the second meeting was a conference call held in December 2016. The Group consists of: Dr. William Crutchfield, Virginia State University; Ms. Terrie Webb, produce/flower producer and former AV client; Ms. Beth O'Connor, Executive Director of the Virginia Rural Health Association; Rick Sizemore, Director of WWRC; Robert Krollman, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (ret. DARS); Renard Turner, farmer, Vanguard Ranch; Dr. Robert Grisso, Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension; Dr. Robert Pittman, Eastern Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Center Virginia Cooperative Extension.

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

- ◇ AgrAbility Virginia has a new website at: www.agrabilityvirginia.org
- ◇ We also have a new Facebook Page! Like us at: www.facebook.com/AgrAbility-Virginia-905173346197288/?fref=nf
- ◇ AgrAbility Virginia has a new brochure! If you would like a few for yourself/agency, please contact Kirk Ballin at the e-mail/tel. below.

Contact AgrAbility Virginia at:

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