



# AgrAbility

## A Program That Works!



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### What is the National AgrAbility Project?

In the United States, farmers and ranchers rank second among laborers with disabilities from work-related injuries.<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), more than 200,000 farmers, ranchers and agricultural workers acquire occupational injuries each year that limit their ability to perform essential work tasks. In response to these statistics, the AgrAbility Project was created to help individuals with disabilities and their families who are engaged in production agriculture to maintain optimal production and experience enhanced quality of life.

AgrAbility received its first federal funding in 1991, and was implemented as recommended in the USDA 1990 Farm Bill (public law 101-624, November 28, 1990). The project links the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) with land-grant universities and private nonprofit disability service organizations to provide practical education and assistance that promotes independence in agricultural production and rural living. The AgrAbility Project assists people who work both on small and large operations.

The USDA AgrAbility Project has two primary components: the State and Regional AgrAbility Projects and the National AgrAbility Project. The National AgrAbility Project is operated by the Purdue University Breaking New Ground Resource Center. Its role is to provide training, technical assistance and information on available resources to the State and Regional AgrAbility Project staff and promote ongoing growth of AgrAbility services in states that do not have AgrAbility projects.

<sup>1</sup> Leigh, J. P., & Fries, J. F. (1992). Disability in occupations in a national sample. *American Journal of Public Health*, 82(11), 1517-1524. National Safety Council. (2004). *Injury facts*. Itasca, IL: National Safety Council.

The map to the right shows current AgrAbility states (in yellow) as well as AgrAbility affiliate states (in light grey). States without AgrAbility Projects are in dark grey. AgrAbility affiliate states are states that have functioning AgrAbility coalitions, but do not have USDA-NIFA funding.



The State and Regional AgrAbility Project staff provides training, site visits, on-farm/ranch assessments, technical assistance and other information directly to the farmer or rancher with a disability. Currently, there are 22 State and Regional AgrAbility Projects.

### Who Are AgrAbility Clients?

AgrAbility clients are individuals or family members who have disabilities or illnesses and who strive to remain independent and successful on their farms or ranches, or individuals employed as agriculture workers. Clients of the AgrAbility Project may have a variety of disabilities, including arthritis, back injuries, amputations, brain injuries, strokes, heart conditions, and visual and hearing impairments.

### Does AgrAbility Work?

In an eight-state study with 618 AgrAbility clients from Utah, Colorado, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri and Mississippi, AgrAbility researchers found that it is most important for farmers with disabilities to be supported by a team that includes individuals who can access farm funding, disability, assistive technology and home modification needs.<sup>2</sup> Eighty percent of 493 reporting clients identified AgrAbility assistance as key to enabling them to live in their home on the farm/ranch.

Results reported by 366 clients include the following:

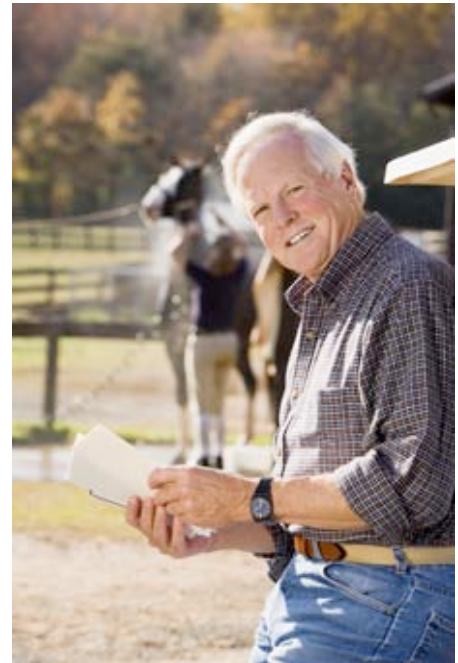
- 63 percent reported being able to operate their machinery on their own as a result of AgrAbility services.
- 58 percent reported being able to manage their farm/ranch independently.
- 47 percent reported being able to complete their ranch/farm chores as a result of AgrAbility intervention.
- 46 percent reported being able to modify their machinery to accommodate their needs.
- Overall, 88 percent of farmers/ranchers with disabilities continue to engage in farming or ranching activities full time or part time.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, R. H., & Fetsch, R. J. (2006). National AgrAbility Project impact on farmers and ranchers with disabilities. *Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health*, 12(4), 275-291.

In a three-state study, 37 new AgrAbility clients who completed their work with AgrAbility in Kansas, Virginia and Wisconsin reported improved physical well-being, decreased physical symptoms, improved support levels, psychological well-being and overall quality of life.<sup>3</sup> They also increased their ability to live and work independently.

By adopting AgrAbility recommendations, they increased their ability to:

- Manage their farm/ranch
- Complete chores
- Operate machinery
- Access workspaces
- Modify their machinery



In the same study:

- 86 percent reported being able to complete chores more successfully.
- 84 percent reported being able to manage their farm or ranch more successfully.
- 73 percent reported being able to operate their machinery more successfully.
- 81 percent reported being able to access workspaces better.
- 87 percent reported being able to live in their home on the ranch/farm.
- 87 percent reported receiving useful information from AgrAbility.
- 89 percent reported being able to follow through on AgrAbility recommendations.

A third study examined participants' responses to training at the Winter Workshop series of trainings provided by the Colorado AgrAbility Project (CAP). Participant responses were recorded following the educational workshops (1998-2008).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Fetsch, R. J., Schuler, R., Beck, M., Simmons, S., Ballin, K., Aherin, R., Little, T., & Luke, V. (2009, October 6). *Evaluating the impacts of direct client services: A four-state report with the McGill Quality of Life Tool*. Presented at the National AgrAbility Training Workshop, Grand Rapids, MI.

<sup>4</sup> Fetsch, R. J., & Reynolds, M. D. (2009). *Colorado AgrAbility Project*. Grant proposal submitted to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Surveys collected over the past 11 years from 201 farmers/ranchers and 226 professionals immediately after participating in three-hour workshops show the following results:

Ranchers/Farmers	Professional Staff	Outcomes
100 percent (200/201)	99 percent (223/225)	Reported increased knowledge.
99 percent (193/194)	100 percent (225/226)	Reported increased satisfaction levels with AgrAbility.
98 percent (196/200)	100 percent (224/224)	Plan to use the information.
100 percent (189/189)	100 percent (213/214)	Want their tax dollars to continue supporting AgrAbility.

CAP assessed not only immediate results, but also medium-range results three to 28 weeks following the educational workshops, giving participants time to think about the research-based information before they made attitudinal and behavioral changes. CAP's mail surveys identified enduring changes in attitudes and behaviors. Surveys collected over the past 11 years from 145 ranchers/farmers and 224 professionals three to 28 weeks following the workshops show the following results:

92 percent (134/145)	98 percent (219/224)	Reported increased knowledge.
90 percent (129/143)	95 percent (212/222)	Reported improved attitude/outlook.
84 percent (118/140)	79 percent (162/205)	Reported doing something to improve their lives.
94 percent (134/142)	97 percent (210/216)	Reported increased satisfaction levels with AgrAbility.
98 percent (139/142)	99 percent (216/218)	Want their tax dollars to continue supporting AgrAbility.

A fourth study reviewed participants' pre-post survey responses following a two-day hands-on Colorado AgrAbility Summer Professionals' Workshop. Over the past three years, participation in CAP's Educational Professionals' Workshops have grown from 20 participants in 2007 to 24 in 2009. Colorado State University's Agricultural Research, Development and Education Center is a land-grant university research farm that hosts this workshop with more than 200 pieces of agricultural equipment, cattle, sheep, irrigation systems and more. Participants have greatly benefited from the hands-on demonstrations and the mixture of classroom and field training.

On June 26, 2009, 22 participants completed pre-tests prior to participating in the two-day workshop and then filled out post-tests upon completion of the workshop. A paired samples test indicated that the group's average scores increased significantly from pre-test to post-test on all nine dependent variables:

1. Increased knowledge about the stresses unique to farm living
2. How disability can impact the farmer, farm operation and family
3. Farm environment, equipment and the wide variety of work tasks
4. Health and safety issues related to farming
5. Potential solutions to accommodate disabilities in farming
6. Assessment tools to determine farmers' priorities and goals
7. Examining the interaction between the farmer and the equipment and animals
8. Providing functional treatment strategies
9. Identifying potential funding sources for assistive technology for the farmer

### Conclusion

Farmers, ranchers and their families have generally reported that, as a result of AgrAbility information, education and assistance, they have an increased ability to manage their ranches/farms successfully, complete chores and operate machinery. Additionally, farmers and ranchers reported being able to live on their farms or ranches independently and have better access to their workplace after receiving assistance from AgrAbility. Farmers and ranchers with disabilities most commonly identified ongoing AgrAbility funding as crucial to support programs that work.

It is an accomplishment to have 98 to 100 percent of ranchers and farmers with disabilities and 99 to 100 percent of professionals who work with them and who participate in AgrAbility workshops say, "Yes, I want my tax dollars to continue to support AgrAbility."

