



Phone: 614-292-0588

Email: agrability@osu.edu

Website: agrability.osu.edu

OHIO AGRABILITY PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

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The Ohio AgrAbility Program is part of a national program that promotes independence for people in agriculture who want to continue to farm after experiencing a disabling condition. Our program's goal is to provide education, resources and technical assistance to those individuals and their families so they may continue to be successful in agriculture. The Ohio State University partners with Easter Seals to bring this program to local farmers and family members.

AgrAbility Partners with Southeastern Ohio Center for Independent Living (SOCIL)

AgrAbility was pleased to partner with SOCIL at three events this spring. SOCIL is an organization dedicated to helping people with disabilities live as independently as possible. At the first event in March, located in Lancaster at the Fairfield County OSU Extension Office, Kent McGuire, AgrAbility's Education Coordinator, presented *Agriculture for All Ages: Preparing for the New Season and Celebrating Agriculture in Fairfield County*. The event was attended by students and farmers of all ages. Kent explained how AgrAbility provides technical assistance, information and recommendations for adaptations, and prevention tips so farmers can maintain productivity on their farms. Kent brought examples of assistive devices for people to try out. The event was also attended by ten agriculture organizations including the Fairfield County Farm Bureau, the local Food Council, OSU Extension, Land Preservation Association, the Farm Service Agency, and Future Farmers of America.

In April, Kent presented the program *Raised Garden Beds and other Alternatives to Planting Flower & Vegetable Gardens*. He provided information sheets with helpful tips for gardeners along with a list of suggestions to prevent work injuries in the yard and garden. Kent's presentation opened people's eyes to how much bending and stretching is involved in planting seeds, pulling weeds, and picking flowers and vegetables. Kent stressed the importance of not overexerting, taking breaks in the shade and how repetitive tasks can lead to injury. Fairfield County Master Gardeners helped promote the program.

In May, Kent was a panel speaker in Logan at the Independence by Design Conference. This event was co-sponsored by the Southeast Ohio Aging & Disability Resource Network, the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, and SOCIL. The conference was offered for people to learn about the latest in universal design and technology options available to support independent living for people of all ages and disabilities.



Sodexo Grant Opens Communication for AgrAbility Participant

Sodexo, through a process at National Easter Seals, provided a grant to Ohio AgrAbility to put technology to use to assist farmers with disabilities. AgrAbility staff decided that use of a tablet and the Dragon software would most benefit Mike, an AgrAbility participant with quadraplegia. Mike was injured in 1999 at his home. He had just retired and was looking forward to full-time farming. However, his injury did not stop him. He is an integral cog in the day to day management of the farm. He strategizes on the buy and sell timing of crops and manages the purchase of equipment, seed, feed, fertilizer and tools. Through Mike's wife, he was able to obtain a variety of computer programs that have been useful in Mike's management of the farm, as well as the extensive reading Mike does every day. He is currently perfecting his use of Dragon, which can provide a variety of opportunities for communication by converting speech into text on the tablet or computer. For the first time, Mike is able to email his grandchildren. The user can also give voice commands to turn equipment on or off, turn on lights or open doors.

Ohio AgrAbility also believes that some of the best learning comes from peers who are experiencing similar situations. A peer to peer meeting is planned for July where Mike and his wife will meet Joe and his wife. Both men farm by overcoming the limitations placed on them by quadraplegia. Both wives are the primary caregivers. Mike will share his experience with Dragon and demonstrate its capabilities for Joe. Joe will demonstrate how a stimulation bike he uses makes his legs pedal from a sitting position. The specialized bike reports on Joe's progress back to a facility in Michigan where he recovered from decubitus ulcers. AgrAbility staff hope the wives will be able to share their experiences also.



Participant Profile – A Friend Helping a Friend

Chris, who has paraplegia, has chosen agriculture as his vocation. Chris is not a life long farmer, but the appeal of being in the field of agriculture has grown on him. Chris and Steve have been long-time friends. When Chris was injured in 2005, Steve went on a mission to make his farm accessible for a wheelchair. Steve wanted Chris to have an accessible work place so he could develop a long range plan for employment. Steve became so passionate about this, he also wanted to hire another worker with paraplegia. AgrAbility is helping Chris and Steve to develop that long range plan that would allow Chris to work full time. To date, all barn surfaces and entrances are accessible. Steve has assembled a hoist to lift Chris onto a tractor. Chris now spends much of his time on the tractor where he feels he is most productive.

This, however, is only the beginning. The long term plan is to increase the size of the farm in hay production, horse boarding and row crops to meet its production goals. Farm buildings and areas that are already accessible include the workshop, bathrooms, kitchenette, livestock grazing areas and gates. Hand controls have been installed on the tractor. A grapple was purchased so Chris could pick up 10 bales of hay at a time and put them in the wagon. AgrAbility also has made recommendations to Chris on access and dealing with health issues related to his paraplegia. AgrAbility will continue to work with this dynamic duo and help them meet their goals..