

First Aid

Spring is a time for fieldwork that can increase the risk of farm accidents. Your first actions after an accident occurs can prevent disability or death.

University of Wisconsin Agricultural Safety specialist Mark Purchwitz, recommends farmers take a first aid course at their local Red Cross or with local health providers like emergency medical technicians.

Farmers should also be ready to respond, even in the field, with easily accessible first aid kits in the barn, sheds, trucks, tractors, and other machinery.

Look for first aid kits at local stores or contact a company, like Gemplers, that carries safety products. You can reach Gemplers at 1(800)382-8473 or on the web at www.gemplers.com.

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Madison, WI 53706

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Permit No. 658



Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families

Spring 2002
Volume 10 No. 4

FEATURING:
The Mikula Family

Partners-Mary Dunn

Neighbor to
Neighbor

Safety: First Aid

Printing donated by
Rural Insurance
Companies.

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Published by
AgrAbility of Wisconsin

AgrAbility of Wisconsin is
a partnership between
the UW Cooperative
Extension Service and
Easter Seals Wisconsin.

UW
Extension



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Plowing Ahead

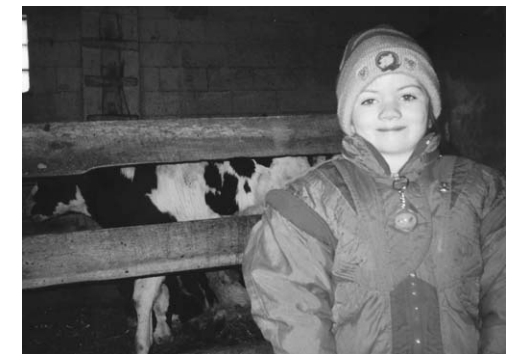
The Mikula Family

Jim and Martha Mikula and their two children, Ruby who is 4 and Jimmy who is 2, meet life's challenges together. Jim is a second-generation dairy farmer from Bloomer, Wisconsin. He has been working on the family farm full time since he graduated from high school in 1983. Jim bought the farm from his dad in 1990. Now, they run the farm on their own and milk 35 cows. Martha is also working toward a degree in elementary education and currently works at Rainbow Kidz daycare in town.

"Nothing fancy, but we are paying the bills," says Jim.

Jim has always wanted to farm and that is all he has ever done. He is instilling respect for animals and for the land in his two children. Ruby is proud of her calves and Jimmy can't wait to go outside.

Both Ruby and Jimmy were born with Arthrogryposis, a disorder that causes severe tightening of joints in their extremities. Yet, Ruby barely noticed her disability as she scampered across the family room when it was time to visit the barn. Jim and Martha are in the process of remodeling their farmhouse and have added an accessible addition and a whirlpool tub to accommodate the children's disabilities. While Ruby was in the hospital having her first surgery, the neighbors helped Jim build the accessible addition from the ground up, in one day.



Ruby Mikula and her calf, Jingles

Jim injured his back unloading bags of fertilizer in January 2001. The painful injury forced him to rethink the way he operated his dairy farm. Martha filled in for Jim in the barn while he healed from his injury. Jim said that back pain was nothing new, but it got worse. "I think it scared my wife more than anything," says Jim. The couple quickly looked for solutions when Jim injured his back because, based on their experience with their children's disabilities, they knew the process could take awhile.

"If they (farmers) wait until they have to have it (assistance) to keep farming, they won't have it in time to save the farm," says Martha.

They decided to rent a power feed cart in February 2001 to eliminate hauling and shoveling silage while doing their chores. They met Dennis Hilgendorf, a CSF vendor, while they were shopping at the Eau Claire Farm Show. Dennis recommended that Jim call AgrAbility of Wisconsin. Jim took the advice and called in March 2001. Since then, Jim has worked extensively with AgrAbility partner Easter Seals Wisconsin's Resource Center for Farmers with Disabilities (RCFD) and the Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to make his work site more accessible and his operation more sustainable. RCFD Director, Paul Leverenz, assessed Jim's farm and discussed the possibilities for improvement with Jim. After Jim and Paul decided how to proceed, DVR worked with Jim to fund most of the equipment.

Jim demonstrates the rolling cob corn scoop. According to Martha, the power feed cart has been the most effective improvement. The cart eliminates shoveling and hauling 45 wheelbarrow loads of silage every day.

She said they could have hired someone to grind batches of feed for them every once in a while, but they couldn't afford to hire someone to feed the cows twice a day without expanding their operation. Instead of hiring a farm worker, Jim built himself a rolling scoop out of spare parts and a little sheet metal to eliminate lifting cob corn into the grinder.



Jimmy and Martha in the Kawasaki Mule

Jim's Kawasaki Mule helps him move equipment and travel around the farm without re-injuring his back. Martha and the kids also benefit because it allows them to access parts of the farm that they wouldn't be able to reach on foot.

While they were on the waiting list for DVR services, Jim and Martha researched the brands and types of equipment they had discussed with Paul. Because of this, Jim's DVR counselor was able to provide services more efficiently when he started working on Jim's case.

Jim has greatly improved the way he handles fertilizer since his injury. Now, thanks to DVR and AgrAbility, he uses a loader with a pallet fork and large bulk bags with loops for the fork to move fertilizer.



Jim's new bulk fertilizer bag

Martha laughs, "Now, the only way Jim will leave the farm is on a stretcher to the hearse!" In the future, Jim and Martha agree that they will continue to farm as a family. They are thinking about installing a small parlor to make milking easier and their operation more sustainable.



Partners... **Taking care of someone – Mom.**

Do you consider it a burden? Pulling the short straw out of the pile? Or, do you look at it as an honor and a privilege to have cared for your loved one? Caregiving, for me, was an honor because it meant that my mother had enough faith in me to ask me to take care of her life. She asked me to help her with financial, emotional, personal care and other things like life support.

Caregiving has been a way of life. My mom provided hospice for her mom who had cancer and for her father who had dementia. At the same time, my mother was raising a young family.

Walking, deciding what you want to eat, and personal care, are things we take for granted. Enabling people with disabilities to do their own thinking allows them to maintain a sense of personal dignity and self-worth. Everybody wants to feel needed and wanted. When people with disabilities make their own decisions, you see how they compensate for disability even though they have needs, wants, and desires like everybody else. I got to know my mom in a different way.

Over the course of living with my mother, our roles gradually reversed; instead of the parent caring for the child, now the child is caring for the parent. She is my mother and my best friend.

Caregiving shifts your role from mother-daughter to friend-friend to something much closer than that. I never thought about my mother's joys and sadness until the closeness forced me to think with her about making accommodations and rearranging our lifestyles.

Being in a wheelchair is not the worst thing in the world. It was an adaptation so that we could continue on with functions like going to church activities, 4-H and cattle shows. There really wasn't any thing to which she didn't go. Even when she was at Bloomfield Manor nursing home last year, she and several residents rode in a van to the Iowa County Dairy Breakfast.

After the visitation and the funeral, everyone went home. My mother wasn't sitting in that chair anymore and I just wished I could be waiting for her again. When mom was alive, I would wait while she got ready to go out – I would start a load of wash; do a little bit of bookwork; start, add a line to, or finish a letter. I would be lying if I said it wasn't frustrating. What seemed like an eternity to me, wasn't to my mother who was working awfully hard just to get around.

Caregiving is a unique opportunity. ...Oh yes. It was a GREAT honor.

Mary Dunn

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Mary Dunn is a former AgrAbility of Wisconsin client who actively participates in our Advisory Council, Speaker Bureau and Farmer Network.

Her most recent contribution to AgrAbility of Wisconsin was the Neighbor-to-Neighbor meeting for local AgrAbility clients that she hosted at her farm on March 21, 2002. She arranged to display a John Deere Gator; a Kawasaki Mule; other assistive equipment like extra tractor steps and handholds; and a homemade calf trailer for her John Deere Gator. When the farmers left, they were well fed and talking about ways to better accommodate their disabilities on their farms.