

# The Adventures of Coco

Since our last Plowing Ahead newsletter three months ago, the Easter Seals Wisconsin's FARM Program's Calf Project is going strong and growing.

As I promised, here is Coco's story. A little over six months ago our project started with our second group of fourteen calves including, ten purchased Holstein bull calves, three donated Holstein bull calves, and one Brown Swiss bull calf.

Jeff and Deb Purvis, owners and operators of Purvis Premier Calves, a custom calf raising business, are significant supporters of our project and again volunteered to raise the calves to approximately 500 lbs so the animals would either sell at auction or be placed on a farm to be raised to finished weight. The proceeds from the sale of the animals would return to the FARM Program, which directly benefits services to farmers.

Deb took a liking to the little Brown Swiss calf with the big brown eyes and long lashes and named him Coco. The months passed and I talked to the Purvis's about plans to sell or move the calves. Deb told me about her attachment to the calf she named Coco and hoped he would go to a good home. After discussion with the FARM staff, I decided to advertise that Coco was for sale and the search for a home for Coco

began. Two weeks passed with no response to the ads placed in two farm newspapers. Then the call came.

A farmer in Sturgeon Bay area was interested in Coco. Jim Zell agreed to transport the calf and one crisp, autumn day Coco made the long trip to his new home. Jim said Coco handled the trip well and the farmer was extremely pleased with Coco. Jim then delivered a check for \$1,200 to Easter Seals Wisconsin Board Member,



Jim Zell, left, presents Skip Ellenbecker with a check for the sale of Coco.

Skip Ellenbecker, to be given to the Calf Project.

Our goal this year is to raise \$13,000. And, with all of the hard work and dedication of staff, farmers, community members and service providers, we should have no problem achieving our goal.

Without the support of those who are dedicated to the success of the FARM Program itself, this project would have never gotten off of the ground. Easter Seals and the FARM staff would like to thank all of those individuals who have donated their time, talents, money, services, and homes

for these calves. Your generosity has been overwhelming and greatly appreciated.

Anyone who is interested in learning more about this worthwhile project can contact T Ellenbecker at (608) 279-9437 or (715) 842-3411. ■

*Submitted by: T Ellenbecker, ESW FARM Program*



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FEATURING:

*Schuler Hangs Up His Hat*

*The FARM Calf Project Progress Report: The Adventures of Coco*

*Easter Seals Board of Directors Visits Farm*

*Safety First: Shop Safety*

ALSO LOOK FOR:  
*Partners... by Ron Schuler, AgrAbility of Wisconsin Director*

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

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AgrAbility of Wisconsin

# Plowing Ahead

## Schuler Hangs Up His Hat

After 15 years with the AgrAbility of Wisconsin (AAW) Program, Dr. Ronald T. Schuler announced his official retirement from the University of Wisconsin and Extension programs in January of this year. However, his role with AAW is far from over as he plans to continue in his efforts to help Wisconsin farmers remain in their life's work. After all, it has been part of his life's work as well.

In 1990, Easter Seals Wisconsin (ESW) expressed interest in a partnership with the University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX) to help farmers with disabilities to continue farming. For the project to be a success, ESW needed a Safety Specialist. At that time the position was vacant, so ESW approached Dr. Schuler who had the ideal combination: a background in agriculture with the expertise of machinery and modifications. He joined the partnership, and since that time, he has become an intricate element in the creation and growth of AAW.

When ESW first came to Schuler, the USDA was developing the first funding program to help farmers with disabilities. In the fall of 1990, an official announcement was made that funding would be available to qualifying states. Schuler took that opportunity

and asked Cheryl Skjolaas, the current UWEX Safety Specialist and National AgrAbility Program Manager, to write the first grant proposal for funding of this new program in Wisconsin.

With the grant's approval, AAW became one of the first five states to receive funding. Today Wisconsin is the only remaining state of those original five to have received funding approval continuously since 1991. According to Schuler, "The success of the program is due to hiring good people and getting out of their way."

Schuler's career started on a dairy farm in Valders, Wisconsin. He earned his undergraduate degrees in Agriculture and Mechanical Engineering. After serving in the army, he then went on to obtain his Masters and Ph.D. in Agricultural Engineering. Schuler worked as a professor at North Dakota State University, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, before finally settling at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, serving as a professor and Chair in the Biological Systems Engineering Department. His knowledge of and passion for agriculture and engineering is obvious in everything he does.

While his extensive career has gained him a considerable amount of recognition, he is modest about his personal contributions to AAW. Many of AAW's clients are not aware of who Dr. Schuler is and the significant impact he has had on the program over



Schuler explains farm modifications to the Easter Seals Board of Directors at an AAW client's farm.

continued from page 1...

the last 15 years. AAW has seen a variety of faces in numerous positions since its inception, but the one constant has always been Schuler, as he continued to lead and strengthen the program.

Even though he does not take credit where credit's due, Schuler has proven his value to the program. This became obvious when Wisconsin submitted the National AgrAbility Grant and the USDA approved the proposal in 2000. This opportunity allowed Schuler to organize a staff to coordinate the AgrAbility program nationwide and increased his responsibility as a Project Leader for the National and the Wisconsin programs. National AgrAbility is currently in its seventh year in the state of Wisconsin.

The UWEX, ESW, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection have developed strong partnerships thanks in part to the encouragement and support provided by Schuler. He notes that

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the partnerships' development was a long process that continues to evolve.

When asked about his proudest accomplishment with AAW, Schuler didn't talk about himself. He is most proud of the ac-

complishments of the program. He recalled a story about a client to explain why this program is so vital to Wisconsin farmers. The dairy farmer had a farm auction scheduled and canceled the auction when an arrangement was made to lease a pipeline milking system through the efforts of AAW. The pipeline system allowed the farmer to eliminate lifting milking buckets and to ease the strain on his back. Schuler says, "Seeing farmers with disabilities succeed as a result of the assistance provided by AgrAbility of Wisconsin is one of the greatest accomplishments."

When one talks to Schuler, his words express how proud he is of every farmer that has successfully continued to farm after the program.

Paul Leverenz, Vice President of the FARM program, worked with Schuler when Leverenz was the only Rehabilitation Specialist involved with AAW. Since those early days of one rehabilitation specialist and 20 clients per year, the program has grown to five rehabilitation specialists and over 400 clients. If the growth of the program is not enough proof of how invaluable Schuler is to AAW, one just needs to talk to the number of people who know him, though in Schuler's case, it may be harder to find someone who does not know him or is not related to him. Those of us who do know and work with him can speak to his passion for agriculture and the AAW program. It is the work of his life. ■

## Easter Seals Board of Directors Visits Farm



Farmer Gerry Krantz (seated) and Easter Seals Vice President of FARM and Vocational Services, Paul Leverenz, demonstrate the modified Toolcat™ that makes it easier for Krantz to feed his livestock.

who are long-time Seals. In 1984, Gerry's right arm was severed, and although doctors were able to reattach it, the injury, combined with arthritis had made daily farm chores too physically demanding for him. Gerry and Lisa were referred to Easter Seals, and have been work-

On November 17, 2006, members of the Easter Seals Board of Directors were able to get an up-close-and-personal look at how the agency's FARM Program benefits farmers with disabilities. The Board traveled to Cross Plains to the 500-acre farm of Gerry and Lisa Krantz, friends of Easter

ing with Paul Leverenz, Vice President of FARM and Vocational Services for Easter Seals Wisconsin, for the past 12 years. Board members and members of the Easter Seals staff visited the milking barn, the machine shop, and the young stock area. Everyone was able to see how different equipment modifications – from a specially-equipped Bobcat skid loader to small hand tool attachments – helped Gerry continue to farm. Because of these innovative efforts, the Krantz family has become an example of the FARM Program's impact. Easter Seals President and CEO, Christine Fessler, who attended the tour, commented: "It was so wonderful to see the Board members get a firsthand look at how the FARM Program truly changes lives. Our Board has always had such strong support for this program, and it's great that they were finally able to see how the combined efforts of Wisconsin's farmers and Easter Seals specialists are making such a difference in people's lives." ■

Submitted by: Mary Statz, Easter Seals Wisconsin

## Partners...

As I enter retirement, I look back at my involvement in various projects and programs. My years growing up on a dairy farm in northeastern Wisconsin were extremely valuable in forming my views and attitudes while working at four different universities over the past 36 years. Since 1984, I have been in Madison at the University of Wisconsin employed as the statewide agricultural machinery extension specialist.

I have been very fortunate to meet many Wisconsin farmers who are willing to use the information that was provided during my extension programs as the machinery specialist. More importantly, many of these farmers shared their on-the-farm experiences and information with me which provided the opportunity to improve my extension programs.

As the state agricultural machinery specialist, I have worked with the 4-H tractor and small engine projects, field demonstrations at Wisconsin Farm Technology Days, AgrAbility and many other county and statewide extension programs. One of the most gratifying programs was AgrAbility, where I have been the project leader since the project was initiated in 1991. It is a project where the impact on the farmer is extremely apparent these farmers are very appreciative of the AgrAbility staff's efforts to assist them in continuing to farm in a more productive environment. The excellent AgrAbility staff who have been employed on the project over the years at extension and Easter Seals have insured the success of the AgrAbility of Wisconsin program.

The importance of the partnership formed over

the years in contributing to the AgrAbility's success cannot be overstated. Building a strong partnership between extension and Easter Seals Wisconsin was the first step in developing an excellent project. This was followed by the relationship developed with staff from the Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Each partner makes a very significant contribution in assisting Wisconsin farmers with disabilities.

I am very fortunate to have worked in a job where I was able to remain close to my childhood experiences and where I had the freedom to develop and pursue projects that were very satisfying. I have always enjoyed coming to work each morning. During these 36 years I have met many people who have been extremely supportive and assisted in improving the programs.

As to the future, I plan to be involved in several projects outside of work, but I will remain involved on a part time basis in some of these current projects and programs including AgrAbility. I hope to see many of you around the state in the future.

**Ronald T. Schuler**  
AgrAbility of Wisconsin Director



Ronald Schuler, AgrAbility of Wisconsin Director

## SAFETY FIRST

### Shop Safety...

Winter is the time of year when farm machinery is pulled out of the fields and into the shop for maintenance and repairs. Maintenance shops are a critical part of any agriculture operation, but just as you would exercise caution when operating machinery in a field, remember to be safe while working in the shop! Below are some simple guidelines to help decrease the possibility of an accident occurring in your shop this winter.

- Don't use defective tools. Hand tools can become worn over a period of time and need to be maintained. Electrical equipment needs to be checked regularly to reduce the possibility of electrical shock.
- Protect your eyes and face. Safety goggles and a face shield will protect a person in case something should happen while working with tools.

- Wash your hands to prevent skin damage. Wash your hands frequently when working with grease, oil or solvents on a regular basis.
- Handle and store flammable liquids with care. Always follow manufacturer's directions for using, handling, storing and disposing of materials. All hazardous materials should be properly labeled and stored in appropriate containers.
- Practice good housekeeping. Always keep your work area clean. Cleaning your work area is a simple but important way to reduce the chance of accidents and injuries.

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