

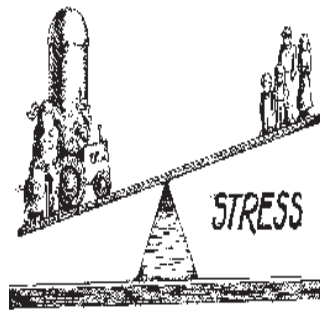
## Need a Break?



### COUPLE'S GET-AWAYS FILL FAST

Farm Couples can get away from the stress and strain of the farm during a series of get-away weekends this spring. These weekends are designed to help couples deal more effectively with stress, learn creative communication skills, make basic decisions and plans for the future, and enjoy a much needed mini-vacation from the farm and farm work.

“Even if it’s for just a couple days, these weekend get-aways can provide farm couples with a welcomed and needed respite from the rigors of day-to-day farm life,” said Kathy Schmitt, vocational coordinator for the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection’s Wisconsin Farm Center.



There is no cost to attend the get-away weekends, which are sponsored by the Sowing the Seeds of Hope coalition. Refreshments, meals, lodging, materials and instruction costs are covered by a grant from the Office of Rural Health Policy



**AgrAbility of Wisconsin**  
460 Henry Mall  
Madison, WI 53706

and the Bureau of Primary Health Care in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Participants are responsible for additional costs, such as phone calls, movies, pizza, etc. There may be financial assistance to defray costs for hired farm labor and childcare for the weekend. Registration, however, is limited to eight couples at each of the locations, and the weekends scheduled for this spring have already filled.

If you want to receive announcements on future get-away weekends, please mail your name, address, and phone number to Roger Williams at Professional Development & Applied Studies, UW-Madison, 610 Langdon St., 313 Lowell Center, Madison, WI 53703-1195.

### OPENINGS FOR FARM WOMEN GET-AWAY

There still are openings for a farm women’s mini-get-away and renewal weekend scheduled for March 30-April 1 at the Midway Hotel in LaCrosse. There is no cost to attend this weekend designed to help farm women deal more effectively with stress, hear and share stories with other farm women, and enjoy a much needed mini vacation from the farm and farm work. Facilitators will be Sister Bernita Marie Bittner, SSND and Mary Margret Bub, co-directors of Visitation Rural Ministries. For more information, call (262) 629-4154 or e-mail [mmbub@juno.com](mailto:mmbub@juno.com). ■

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### FEATURING:

*You're Not an Island--  
Partnerships Benefit  
Everyone*

*Sensitive Issues Brought  
to Media*

#### Need a Break?

- *Couple's Get-Aways  
Fill Fast*
- *Openings for Farm  
Women Get-Away*

### ALSO LOOK FOR:

*Partners...  
by Paul Leverenz*

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AgrAbility of Wisconsin

# Plowing Ahead

## YOU'RE NOT AN ISLAND – PARTNERSHIPS BENEFIT EVERYONE

*A Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor's Perspective on AgrAbility of Wisconsin*

It has been said that the majority of the population is nearly five generations removed from the farm. This being the case, who can a farmer turn to when he/she needs help? Can service providers with little to no agricultural background truly understand a farmer's needs and help him/her continue to farm? The answer to those questions is, “yes.”

### BRIDGING THE GAP

There are a variety of resources that service providers such as health professionals and rehabilitation counselors can draw from to help in making informed choices. AgrAbility of Wisconsin is one such resource available to help in bridging the gap between the agricultural community and those who provide assistance to farmers. These partnerships benefit everyone involved. T Ellenbecker, a retired Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Counselor, explained that utilizing available resources and consulting with experts for possible suggestions on rehabilitation technology was very valuable. “Not only are you helping to provide the best quality of service to the consumer, but in the long-run it actually saves people time and money.”

### FORMING PARTNERSHIPS

Strong partnerships are crucial to the success of the AgrAbility program. Since its beginning in 1991, AgrAbility has formed many valuable partnerships throughout the state. T Ellenbecker, a DVR counselor and AgrAbility supporter, is a great example of someone who has provided an important link for connecting farmers in her county to the AgrAbility program.

T has worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the past eleven years, and only recently began her retirement. During her years of service, T spent her days



*T Ellenbecker, retired  
Wisconsin DVR counselor.*

meeting consumers, counseling them on career choices, assisting them in setting realistic work goals, documenting chosen services in the form of a work plan, answering phone calls from consumers, facilitating services for consumers, traveling to present service information, and making sure all the right players were involved providing the best quality service possible.

### WORKING WITH FARMERS

T has no formal background in agriculture. She was born in Chicago, and at age 6 moved with her family to Tomahawk, Wisconsin. While growing up, T had neighbors who farmed, but it wasn't until she was married that she learned about agriculture from her in-laws. As a vocational rehabilitation counselor, T worked with more than 100 consumers each year. Within her caseload, she also worked with some farmers—most had dairy operations and a few had small ginseng operations along with dairy.

Regardless of her background, T explained that she felt very much at home with farmers and that farmers in general had a good work ethic and were extremely nice to work with. She recalls working with farmers who came

*continued on page 2...*

continued from page 1...

across as almost apologetic for asking for services. T said, "[Farmers] don't see themselves as being disabled...they have been doing things the hard way for so long, and quite a few had to be shown that services would accommodate their needs and help them to be more productive.... [Farmers] didn't want to be thought of as taking advantage of the state system...thinking that they were using money that could be used elsewhere.... [Farmers] were one group that consistently thanked me for helping. [They were] always so appreciative of services that were provided and so surprised with the positive results."

*"[Farmers] don't see themselves as being disabled...they have been doing things the hard way for so long, and ...[aren't aware accommodations can] help them be more productive."*

*--T. Ellenbecker*

One farmer T worked with was in his 50's and significantly disabled having had back surgery along with two failed knee surgeries. She explained that this individual accommodated himself by mounting the tractor from the back and climbing over the seat, a process that took nearly twenty minutes. In this case with the help of Paul Leverenz, Resource Center for Farmers with Disabilities (RCFD) Director, a special step for mounting the tractor was recommended and purchased by DVR. It was very gratifying for T to work with this farmer knowing that she had helped him to continue with his selected vocation—farming.

### ADVICE TO COUNSELORS

T can be quoted as saying, "You're not an island...you need to work with other people." Given a chance to share her wisdom with other counselors, T emphasized that a person shouldn't always rely on his/her own knowledge

to make decisions such as rehabilitation technology recommendations. She explained that it only takes one bad case to create bad publicity. She felt there was no better way to provide quality service and get good publicity than to work cooperatively with other organizations. Along with her work with AgrAbility, T noted the Wisconsin Farm Center and the UW Extension offices as other very important sources for her to gain valuable information and support.

### ALWAYS CONSULT OTHERS

T learned the hard way to always consult people who know "the business." After obtaining recommendations for a farmer who had arthritis in his hips and knees, a vocational plan was developed. The plan outlined the purchase of a 3-wheeled feed cart that would hold seven bushels. The farmer requested a fifteen bushel cart stating that it would require fewer trips to feed protein. T honored his request and DVR purchased the larger cart. T consulted with Paul, RCFD Director, about the change. Even though the purchase seemed logical, it actually put the farmer in a position that was aggravating his disability more. A larger cart capacity added significant weight due to proteins density. T learned quickly from that mistake saying,

"I never did that again...I always went back and asked what is the impact if we make any changes?"

### PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Originally, T planned to simply retire not intending to go back to work. Now, she figures that within a year she will be back in the workforce again. AgrAbility thanks T for her many years of friendship, support, and efforts to promote success in agriculture for people with disabilities. We wish her the best with all she does in the future. ■

*Editor's Notes: Examples of specialized equipment purchased and modifications to equipment or worksites are just that – examples. What works for one individual is not always true for another.*

## Sensitive Issue Brought to Media

*This information is being reprinted from the December "Open Letter to the Media" disseminated to newspaper editors and radio stations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota. It represents only the opinions of the persons listed and is not an official communication from their employer institutions.*

A 4-year-old Wisconsin girl wanders away from her sandbox into a cornfield where her father is chopping corn. He doesn't see her and runs her over with the forage harvester, which amputates her arm.

A 3-year-old North Dakota boy is in the back of his dad's pickup truck while his dad uses an auger to move grain. His dad steps out of the truck to shut off the tractor; the 3-year-old becomes entangled in the auger and loses both arms.

A 19-month-old Minnesota boy is with his father, who is working on the family farm. His father suddenly realizes he can't see his son. He finds him face down in 15 inches of water in an 18-inch deep gutter that collects runoff from the feedlot. Efforts to revive the toddler are unsuccessful. (continued on page 3...)

## Partners...



*A few months back, October 13th to be exact, I was injured in an accident involving my sawmill. I sustained some pretty serious injuries to my left hand. After a trip to the emergency room and surgery that followed, the doctor pronounced that I would be "good as new" in about three months—tops. The doctor suggested I come to his office the next Monday so he could see how I was doing and talk about what to expect in the months ahead. Being a compliant patient, I arrived for my appointment Monday. I entered the doctor's office with the expectation that I would be told to take a week off of work and then to stop in once in a while so the doctor could see how I was doing.*

*Well, I was WRONG! Instead I learned that in order to assure full functioning in all of my fingers in the future, I would need to see an occupational therapist three times a week for up to three months. This eye-opening information made me realize that for a "somewhat unknown" time period I was going to be dependent on lots of people I didn't normally incorporate in my daily plans. Next, I was informed that my prescribed medication would keep me from driving for at least a month. With occupational therapy forty miles away, I now had to rely on a partner to drive me to my appointments. After meeting my therapist on Tuesday, I began to understand how much of a partner she too was going to be in this process. Then there was the insurance company, the pharmacist, the family doctor and the hand surgeon. It was also necessary to call upon many family members and friends to complete normally routine activities,*

*as well as relying on them to help me stay positive and focused on what I needed to do to recover. All of these people aided in my journey to recovery.*

*Through this whole process, I discovered that there were more than enough people willing to help with whatever my family or individual needs were. The greater challenge, however, was for me to allow them to do so and accept their kind acts as gifts. I also found that all of the professional partners in the puzzle were extremely busy, and I had to fit my life into their schedules. Five minutes with the doctor was an eternity, and extra time to get a question answered by the therapist was rare as they were always scheduled tight. The opportunity for any of them to understand how this process was impacting my life was non-existent.*

*Approaching the end of the first part of my recovery, I now realize that I had the rare opportunity to live in the world of a person with a disability—for just a brief moment in the grand scheme of time. I am humbled by the experience. This injury and the experience has reaffirmed my commitment that all of us at the AgrAbility project always take the time to understand what farmers are experiencing when they call to talk or ask for some information. Even with a busy schedule, it is important to allow time to treat people as individuals who require individual approaches to problem-solving and technology application. These are things we have always tried to do and will continue doing with the AgrAbility project. We must remember that we are but a partner with the farmers, working toward their continued success.*

*-- Paul Leverenz  
RCFD Director  
Easter Seals Wisconsin*

These are just three of the recent tragic incidents involving young farm children in the Upper Midwest. These are not freak accidents. They are preventable injuries.

### ADULTS MUST REMEMBER THAT:

- ◆ Young children are not responsible for their own safety.
- ◆ You cannot do farm work and supervise a young child at the same time.
- ◆ Young children do not belong at the farm work site.



### WHAT CAN FARM PARENTS DO?


- ◆ Investigate all options that would enable you to keep young children away from the work site. Could you leave them with a neighbor, a friend, or another responsible adult?
- ◆ Clearly think out your priorities. How much risk are you willing to take when it comes to your children's safety?

- ◆ Discuss these issues with all family members. If there is disagreement, consider talking to your pastor, county Extension agent, health care provider, neighbor, friend, or other trusted community member in an effort to come up with a solution.

Signed (in alphabetical order),

*Nancy M. Esser, Ag Youth Safety Specialist, Nat'l. Children's Center for Rural & Ag Health & Safety, Marshfield, WI; Virginia Fischer, M.S., Health Educator, Nat'l. Farm Medicine Center, Marshfield, WI; Barbara Marlenga, RN, Ph.D., Assoc. Scientist, Nat'l. Children's Center for Rural Ag Health & Safety, Marshfield, WI; Barbara Mulhern, Editor, Gempler's ALERT, Belleville, WI; Mark A. Purschwitz, Ph.D., Extension Agricultural Safety & Health Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Michele A., Schermann, RN, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Extension Service; Gail Scherweit, Safety Coordinator, North Dakota Farm Bureau; John Shutske, Ph.D., Extension Agricultural Safety & Health Specialist, University of Minnesota; Cheryl A. Skjolaas, Youth Ag Safety Specialist, University of Wisconsin Center for Agricultural Safety & Health; Jayne Thompson-Meier, Farm Labor Specialist, U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, Madison, WI. ■*

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