

New Grant Funds Equipment Re-utilization Website

Since 1991, AgrAbility of Wisconsin (AAW) and the Easter Seals (ES) FARM program have recommended agriculture-related assistive technology to WI farmers with health conditions that affect their ability to continue farming. These pieces of equipment range from new skid loader controls, to utility vehicles, to added steps for tractors. With the services of the WI Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, AgrAbility estimates DVR and AAW have helped farmers acquire over 4000 devices or pieces of equipment.

The recommended equipment accommodated the farmer's work limitation, but as health conditions and farming operations changed, AAW wanted to know if the assistive technology was still being used? And if it is not, could another farmer benefit from the unused technology.

The Easter Seals (ES) FARM program was awarded a grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research to study the types of assistive technology recommended, the current utilization and the feasibility of offering unused equipment to other farmers in need.

The study surveyed 178 Wisconsin farmers

who had obtained 1102 pieces of machinery recommended by AAW/ ES FARM Program specialists. Out of the 1102, 78 pieces of equipment were no longer being used. They still owned 58 of the 78 pieces of this equipment and indicated 31 pieces were available to sell or give away to another farmer with a disability. All but one piece of this equipment was in excellent or good condition.

The study revealed that over 70% of those surveyed had access to the web. This information turned out to be crucial in the development of how to set up an exchange for the unused equipment. After several months of development, the AAW staff and Advisory Council decided on an Internet-based craigslist-style website that allows farmers to post machinery and contact one-another to finalize an exchange or sale. The website can be accessed at www.EasterSealsWisconsin.com. Just click on Ag Equipment Exchange. Whether selling, buying or giving away, farmers can post to this website free of charge.

If you have equipment you would like to donate or sell, post directly on the website or contact Bruce Whitmore at 1-800-422-2324 for assistance.

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FEATURING:

Farmer Receives Help
After Second Injury

Safety First:
Cold Hazards

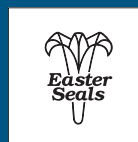
Partners...
Cally Ehle's Farewell

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AgrAbility of Wisconsin Plowing Ahead

Farmer Receives Help After Second Injury

Sitting around Tom Breeggemann's kitchen table for an AgrAbility Neighbor-to-Neighbor meeting he was hosting, Tom told his neighbors that "I never thought I had a disability till I got older and my hips and back started going out." What's remarkable about that statement is that Tom Breeggemann was born without arms below his elbows. His left arm extends to his elbow ending with two fingers that are joined together. His right forearm is approximately three quarters in length with three fingers and one thumb. He also has severe scoliosis. While others may have considered this a disability, Tom never has.

Tom began his farming career when he and his brother bought their father's 200 acre farm in Minnesota in 1969, the same year he married his wife, Pat. In 1990, after selling the Minnesota farm, he bought a 480-acre farm in Wisconsin and moved his family and his dairy herd to operate his own dairy farm, Mellow-Brook Holsteins. He and his wife, Pat, have 9 children, and when she died thirteen years ago, he raised the six children still at home by himself while continuing to farm. To hear Tom talk, you'd think there was nothing to it.

Today, Tom and his second youngest son, Matt, have 80 registered Holstein. They milk 80 cows, have about 80 young stock and grow crops on 255 acres that are fed to the dairy herd for the production of quality milk. The cattle are of exceptional quality, producing above average milk for state standards. Matt primarily does the milking and Tom handles feeding the cattle, cleaning the barns and doing most of the crop work, though he does occasional relief milking as needed.



Tom Breeggemann shows his prize holstein.

What brought Tom to AgrAbility? In 2001, Tom decided he needed help.

Years of repetitively bending, reaching, stooping, climbing and lifting on his dairy operation, coupled with severe scoliosis, had resulted in constant pain in his hips, back and arms. Feeding his animals and cleaning the barn by hand were nearly impossible. A neighbor told him about AgrAbility of Wisconsin (AAW). Tom contacted AgrAbility and then, at AAW's suggestion, also applied for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) services. DVR contracted with AgrAbility to conduct a farm site assessment and to make recommendations that would accommodate his disability and make it easier and safer to work

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in agriculture. Laurie McLain, Tom's DVR counselor, understood Tom's needs and the adaptations to his agricultural operation that he needed to remain in his farming career. Ms. McLain was "very respectful and understood me and my needs," said Tom. DVR helped purchase a motorized feed cart to reduce the material handling of feed and a skid steer to reduce the physical labor of removing manure. Tom found these accommodations extremely helpful and his case was closed. Laurie McLain indicated that "I am glad that DVR was able to assist Tom in providing accommodations that allowed him to continue farming.



Breeggemann shows neighbor-to-neighbor participants his air-ride seat tractor.

He has a very nice farm operation and works hard to keep it a success.

In 2007, Tom broke his shoulder and hurt his back, which resulted in 4 ruptured vertebrae, and the pain and restricted motion returned. Despite ice packs and cortisone shots to relieve the pain, Tom found it harder and harder to even walk from the house to the barn. In the summer months, he used a golf cart for mobility but that didn't work well during the winter snow and ice. Walking on the snow and ice was excruciatingly slow and occasionally he would fall. He could no longer pick up the 50 pound small hay bales, or even operate the feed cart because its jerky motions aggravated his back and arms. Operating his tractors to handle manure, to plant corn, cut hay, or haul grain and to till the land increased pain to his back, arms and hips. Tom decided to contact AgrAbility and DVR to see if they could help him again. Tom's case was reopened and another farm site assessment was conducted.


The recommendations AgrAbility made for Tom to DVR included; a round baler to eliminate lifting 50 lb. small bales, a new seat and air ride suspension for the tractor he uses to plant, cut and haul crops and air ride suspension for the tractors he uses

hauling manure and preparing the land have minimized the bouncing and jarring to his back and hips. A motorized grain cart reduced the vibrations and jerky motion from his current feed cart that caused pain in Tom's shoulders and arms. A utility vehicle that Tom could use year round would allow him to travel safely and effectively around his farmstead was recommended.

Tom believes that the recommendations AgrAbility made and DVR purchased, will allow him to work safer and easier. In combination, he thinks that all the accommodations saved him from having a rod surgically placed in his back.

When asked to consider hosting an AgrAbility Neighbor-to-Neighbor get together, Tom readily agreed. "I really appreciate what AgrAbility of Wisconsin did for me." Hosting the Neighbor-to-Neighbor meeting may be a way to give back. "If I can help one other person out, I'll be very happy."

At 71 years, Tom is as active and engaged in his farm and his rural community as he ever was. He and his son, Matt, show their prize Holsteins at county fairs and district shows. Two years ago, Tom formed an LLC with Matt and hopes to keep working till his son is "on his feet". "I love my farm and my cows and want to get my boy going. Without AgrAbility I wouldn't have been able to keep going."

 **Plowing Ahead**
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SAFETY FIRST

Cold Hazards...

Given the winter working conditions for many Wisconsin farmers, injuries resulting from unprotected exposure to the cold are a very real danger. Frostnip, frostbite and hypothermia are the most common cold weather injuries.

While the freezing point of skin is about 30°F, wind chill can be a significant factor in cold exposure injuries. If the temperature outside is 40°F and the wind speed is 35mph, it will feel like 11°F on skin. Frostnip, which often occurs to the cheeks, earlobes, fingers and toes, is the freezing of the top layers of skin tissue. Its effects are generally reversible. Frostbite is the actual freezing of the tissues or a body part and can destroy tissue and lead to loss of function or the need to remove the body part. The symptoms of frostbite include uncomfortable sensations of coldness, tingling, stinging, or aching feeling followed by numbness. Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature drops below 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. Severe hypothermia can lead to death. Treatments for all three conditions include the gradual re-warming of the affected area or the whole body in the case of hypothermia. To treat mild hypothermia you should re-warm your skin using warm water. Don't rub the area because it can cause more tissue damage. Seek immediate medical attention for severe hypothermia. Also remember that skin that has been injured by cold before is more susceptible for a second injury.

Many conditions, medications, and diseases may interfere with you're a person's ability to heal or fight infection from injuries caused by cold exposure.

- Conditions that may change your mental awareness (mental illness, dementia)
- Conditions that affect body temperature regulation (stroke, head injury, Parkinson's)
- Conditions that slow the body's ability to make heat (hypothyroidism, adrenal gland disorders)
- Immobility (spinal cord injuries, strokes)
- Medications (blood thinner, corticosteroids, anti-depressives)
- Diseases (arthritis, atherosclerosis, diabetes, multiple sclerosis)

Common sense should prevail, despite the urgency of the work to be done. If something happens to you, who will do the work. Always protect feet, hands and face during winter months because heat is lost most quickly through extremities. Wear a hat and wear shoes or boots that protect against dampness. Dress in layers and avoid prolonged exposure to cold temperature. You can also use thermal insulating material on the handles of equipment to protect hands from touching frozen metal. When it is especially cold, take breaks to get warm and shield yourself from high winds. For more information on symptoms, treatment and protective measures to cold temperature exposure, visit WebMD at www.webmd.com.

Partners...

This past July was a bittersweet time for me, it not only marked four years with AgrAbility of Wisconsin, but it also closed the chapter on that part of my life as outreach specialist for the program. July 18 was my last day as the outreach specialist as I moved on to the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) as the State Outreach Coordinator.

I've met many amazing people and heard their stories, which I'll never forget. I hope that in my future

endeavors I will be able to keep being a spokesperson for the AgrAbility of Wisconsin. I've already had a great opportunity through FSA to discuss the AgrAbility program to other FSA State Outreach Coordinators! Thank you again to everyone for a great four years and if you are around the statewide farm shows and see me at the FSA booth, please don't hesitate to stop by and say hello!

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