

SAFETY FIRST

Environmental Hazards in the Fields...



With spring here and summer just around the corner, many farmers are spending more time in the fields. While machinery and road safety are important to remember, many don't consider the factor of environmental hazards that are present in the fields. But the environment can present a separate set of challenges and problems that operators need to be aware of in the field.

- **Rough Ground:** Look ahead for rough ground and anticipate bumps and slowdowns. Mark sharp breaks, gullies, and ditches ahead of tilling and planting, and stay away from them.
- **Stones and Other Obstacles:** Large stones, buried stumps, or logs can damage equipment, be alert so you can avoid such hazards.
- **Temperature:** Temperatures above 80° F can

cause heat stress without a person recognizing it. By drinking plenty of fluids, avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages, wearing loose fitting, breathable clothing and taking breaks as needed

- **Darkness:** The danger of working at night is not being able to see or be seen. Without adequate working lights, a rock, fence, stump, or ditch can be hit before it's seen, causing potential damage to the equipment or injury to the operator.

Remembering all factors that affect the safety of operating equipment is important. By remembering these environmental factors when working in the field, all farmers can have a safe season in the fields. ■

Information provided by: Farm & Ranch Safety Management Publication

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Madison, WI
Permit No. 658

AgrAbility of Wisconsin
Biological Systems Engineering
UW-Madison
460 Henry Mall
Madison, WI 53706



Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families

Summer 2008
Volume 17 No. 1

FEATURING:

Help for Farmers With Disabilities
by Jenna Ewert

Jim Zell Receives Easter Seals Award

Safety First: Environmental Hazards in the Fields

ALSO LOOK FOR: Partners... by Jenna Ewert, Americorp FARM Volunteer

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

Printing costs donated by Rural Insurance Companies.

UW Extension



AgrAbility of Wisconsin

Plowing Ahead

Help for Farmers With Disabilities

Sitting in a tractor all day can tire a farmer out, but usually not to the point of exhaustion. For Mike Hansen, though, the pain in his back caused exactly that problem, and it almost made him give up farming.

Hansen owns a farm called Gifts from the Good Earth near Milladore, Wis., where he and his family raise organic and all-natural meat products through Rotational Intensive Grazing. He suffers from spinal stenosis, which causes severe and often painful degeneration in the disks of his lower back.

Described by himself and his FARM specialist Jeff Kratochwill as "not a normal farmer," Hansen, who

earned a degree in community planning, became involved in production agriculture during college when he met Deb, the woman who is now his wife.

"My wife grew up on a farm in Wisconsin and I started helping [her father] back in 1983, so I found farming when I found her," he said.

At one point during that time, Hansen decided he wanted to start a little garden so he went to the gardening store to pick up tools and fertilizer. When he read the fertilizer bags he saw phrases like, "can cause cancer" and "not safe for contact with skin."

"...and I thought, this is stupid," he said. "I want to grow a tomato and I'm going to put this on it?"

After that, Hansen started an organic three-acre variety market garden, "and never looked back."

In 1995 he and his wife bought an old 80-acre dairy farm, and worked to fix it up and restore the land for the next few years. In 1997 they switched

from organic produce to meat products, achieving organic certification for that market in 1998.

Today, Hansen works with a group of seven farms, collectively called Good Earth Farms, raising organic chicken, pork, turkey, lamb and beef. Currently, Hansen's farm

focuses on beef and lamb production, but the animals shift to and from the other farms when necessary. All advertising, customer service and shipping is also handled through Hansen's farm.

After cutting hay for almost five hours one day last June, Hansen had finally had enough.

"I was physically exhausted from trying to fight the pain with a half an hour left," he said. "When I had to finish the field in first gear, I realized I couldn't fight it anymore."

Hansen has had back problems for many years, but about two years ago the painful part of the degeneration started for him.

"It wasn't debilitating at first," he



Modifications to the shipping room were made, by adding a conveyor belt to lift the boxes straight from the shipping table up and outside to the loading dock.

continued from page 1...

said. "I would get pinched nerves when I got out of vehicles, or I would lose the use of my left leg for short periods of time when I stood up."

But as time went on, even the simplest task brought Hansen unbearable pain. "It was either I was going to quit or I was going to get help," he said.

And that was when he found AgrAbility.

Unlike many farmers who find out about programs like this and sit on the information for months or even years, Hansen called AgrAbility within hours.

"A real great motivator for that is not being able to walk," he said.

After calling AgrAbility and then being directed to DVR for services, Hansen met with DVR counselor Paul Untiet in April 2007. Untiet then put Hansen in touch with Kratochwill, a FARM specialist, for a farm assessment in July. During the assessment Kratochwill walked through Hansen's farm looking for ways to improve the efficiency and ease of Hansen's day to day tasks.

With Hansen's back and the intense daily tasks he is involved in, this was a big job.

The first problem that was discussed was the shipping room. Since all the meat that Good Earth Farms ships is packaged and delivered from his farm, Hansen was daily loading and pushing 70 pound boxes.

By immobilizing his back with copious amounts of athletic tape, Hansen's physical therapist had already helped him assess the motions that needed to be eliminated from his packing routine. So Hansen and Kratochwill began by discussing some of the toughest maneuvers he had to perform.

The next problem was the tractor that he was using. It was a Leyland 270 that he used for every task on the farm: cutting and raking pastures, transporting round bales, and manure hauling. Without an air ride seat, the vibrations Hansen felt while driving it were causing him immense pain.

Also, as 6'4" Hansen described it, "getting into it was like getting into a fighter jet." Hansen and he discussed the operator's station improvements.

After a follow up visit to the farm with both the Unteit and Kratochwill, DVR began purchasing equipment for Hansen.



Unlike the old Leyland, the John Deere 6405 has an enclosed cab and an air ride seat.

Following extensive searching for a used tractor that would fit his needs, Hansen settled on a John Deere 6405 a friend from church was selling. Unlike the old Leyland, it had an enclosed cab and an air ride seat. The seat also swivels slightly, protecting Hansen from twisting his back to look at machinery.

In order to help with his shipping ailments, Hansen and Kratochwill decided upon an adjustable table that could lift boxes from the loading dock up into the delivery truck.

"It's a Godsend," he said. "It's amazing how many uses we can find for that."

DVR also provided Hansen with a conveyor belt to lift the boxes straight from the shipping table up and outside to the loading dock.

The final purchase DVR made for Hansen was a modification to lift the hay bales in his bale feeding wagon in order to let the cattle eat the hay that fell off of the bales, instead of it just being compacted into the bottom of the wagon.

Along with these implements, Hansen has spent countless hours figuring out how to make the most of every movement he must perform every day.

The implements that were installed into his shipping room are paired perfectly with tables, and carts and roller tracks that are exactly the right height to slide boxes and tubs of meat from one surface to another. Everything moves out of the freezer, into the boxes and onto the truck with the smallest possible amount of exertion.

"It's unreal, being able to do your work without dreading pain is incredible," Hansen says as he proudly shows off his packing room.

In the center of the packing room rests a long stand filled with dumbbells, reminding Hansen daily that he once was an avid weight lifter. Although he has been forced to give up that hobby, something he has always enjoyed doing, the

Easter Seals FARM Program and DVR have helped Hansen hold onto one of his greatest loves, farming.

"Easter Seals coming and helping was such a blessing," he said. ■

Feature Story by: Jenna Ewert, Americorp FARM Program Assistant

“It's unreal, being able to do your work without dreading pain is incredible.”
-- Mike Hansen

This material is based upon work supported by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under special project number 2006-41590-03414. UW-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming including Title IX and ADA. If you need this material in another format, please contact AgrAbility of Wisconsin at (608) 262-9336 or aaw@mailplus.wisc.edu.

Partners...

This past year flew by for me at Easter Seals as I was fortunate enough to become the very first AmeriCorps FARM Program assistant.

I learned about the FARM assistant position through my advisor at UW Madison where I am currently a junior studying Life Sciences Communication and Agronomy.

I was very excited about the opportunity since I had just switched into the school of agriculture in Madison. You see, I grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota and had always had a love for agriculture, but my freshman year of college I decided I was going to major in English and leave farming behind.

Although I really enjoyed all of my classes in the English department, I always felt like something was missing. I finally decided I should stick with what I know and pick out an agricultural major. Shortly after my transition I learned about the AmeriCorps position.

Although I wasn't exactly sure what to expect, the program really intrigued me and I decided

I needed to learn more about it, so I applied for the position. After I was hired people began asking me what I hoped to learn from this experience, and I really didn't have a very good answer for them. I wanted to learn more about machinery, I said.

Since I spend the year working mostly with farmers and vendors to find equipment and get prices, I did learn about machinery, but that turned out to be much less significant than I thought it would be. What I did learn, was the inner workings of a program that I never could have imagined until I had already seen it.

I have become aware to an aspect of farming that I had really never spent much time thinking about. Now the disabilities that come out of the farming are one of the top thoughts in my mind.

As I work my agronomy internship this summer as a crop scout with Pioneer in Reinbeck, Iowa I will be thinking of Easter Seals and of spreading disability awareness.

Jenna Ewert
AmeriCorps FARM Program Assistant

Jim Zell Receives Easter Seals Award

Easter Seals Wisconsin held their annual Recognition Dinner at Nakoma Golf Club Tuesday, May 20th. The dinner recognized those people and organizations around the state that make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities as well as individuals with disabilities whose lives and accomplishments have inspired others.

One of those receiving recognition was Jim Zell of Mosinee who received the 2008 Outstanding Volunteer Service award.

After sustaining significant back injuries during a fall on his dairy farm in 1999, Jim contacted Easter Seals Wisconsin. The agency's FARM Program sent a Rural Rehabilitation Specialist to Jim's farm to assess the way he was completing necessary tasks and to suggest ways in which he could alter those tasks to in order to accommodate the disabling pain he was dealing with and remain in farming. Impressed by the assistance he received, Jim began to share information about the program with neighbors and has since persuaded more than 25 farmers to contact Easter Seals for information and advice on dealing with a disability in a farm setting. "Having someone like Jim, a respected member of the agricultural community, promoting the Easter Seals FARM Program has helped increase our visibility and adds

to our credibility in central Wisconsin," states Paul Leverenz, Vice President of Vocational Services for Easter Seals Wisconsin.

Jim has hosted a number of local and national events on his farm, including National AgrAbility Training, the National Resource Conservation Service, and an AgrAbility meeting in Wausau.

In addition to sharing information about the FARM Program, Jim has also become involved in raising funds for Easter Seals. He serves on the planning committee for the Wausau Raffle and Dance, obtains prizes, sells raffle tickets, works at the event from beginning to end and recruits his family to help out as well. With family and friends, he also attends the Eau Claire Fall Fun Fest where he takes advantage of the occasion to talk with other attendees about the good work that Easter Seals does. Best of all, he does all this with - in the words of Brenda Thompson, Development Director for Northern Wisconsin - "a smile on his face and a happy heart."

Provided by: Brian Schuetz, Easter Seals Wisconsin

Plowing Ahead

Published by AgrAbility of Wisconsin
Editor/Layout Designer:
Cally Ehle
Please direct inquiries to:
AgrAbility of Wisconsin
460 Henry Mall, Madison, WI
53706
(608) 262-9336 Voice
(608) 262-1228 Fax
aaw@mailplus.wisc.edu