



Plowing Ahead

Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families

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FEATURING:

**Back Injury Motivates
Spencer Man's Move
to Farming**

**Sharpening "Life's
Saw"**

**Heart of the Farm
Conferences Slated**

ALSO LOOK FOR:

**Partners...
by Paul Untiet, DVR**

Caregiver's Corner

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Back Injury Motivates Spencer Man's Move to Farming

They moved to Wisconsin to be closer to family and for the hunting, but it was an auto accident that ultimately motivated Jeff Purvis toward his dream to farm. Purvis got a taste of agriculture while growing up on his family's hobby farm in Indiana. His involvement in 4-H along with a high school work release program at a soybean and corn operation also fed his desire to farm; however, this avenue wasn't pursued. Instead, Purvis spent four years in the army where he completed training for diesel mechanics and for a majority of his working years had been employed in the heavy construction field.



*Jeff & Debbie Purvis,
Purvis Premier
Calves, Spencer, WI*

In fact during the summer of 1998, he was working in residential construction when he was injured in an auto accident on the job. This caused back problems and a tingling sensation in his legs, which restricted him to light duty work and lifting limitations of no more than 15 to 20 pounds with occasional bending. Realizing that his work in the construction arena could be no more, Purvis sought assistance from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

With his back problems making it difficult to work for more than a three-hour stretch without a break, Purvis explored the idea of starting his own business and utilizing the empty buildings currently in existence on

his farm in Spencer. With this in mind, his DVR counselor brought the AgrAbility of Wisconsin program into the mix.

Paul Leverenz, Director of the Easter Seals Resource Center for Farmers with Disabilities (RCFD) and AgrAbility partner, recalls Purvis needing to work through two stages. First, determining what would be a viable agricultural operation given his disability and second, determining what changes would need to be made based on the selected operation. To help with this decision making process, AgrAbility made Purvis aware of various options and coordinated involvement from Clark County's Extension Agent, Matt Jorgenson. In the end; however, Leverenz explains that options were presented to Purvis and it was then up to him to do his homework. "After all, you weren't going to be able to tell him what to do," Leverenz said with a smile.

WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

Taking the ideas presented him, Purvis continued to peruse the newspapers searching for a job that would fit his skills and abilities. That is where he found an



*Current calf housing
incorporates individual
and group hutches.*

advertisement from Land O' Lakes for custom cattle raising, and though he had Leverenz sit in on a few initial meetings, Purvis jumped in feet first explaining that "sometimes you just need to fly into it and see what happens."

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Changes were needed before calf raising could begin. As a result, his barn was modified from a free stall housing setup to individual calf housing. Removal of the H bunk feeder and installation of a feed room for mixing and feeding calf milk replacer was also necessary, but in May of 1999, the Purvis' began raising 80 calves with a success rate of 100%. Their success with Land O' Lakes; however was short lived, and though they considered the experience a

“Some people we work with are farming better because of our involvement, while Jeff is farming because of our involvement.”
-- Paul Leverenz,

good stepping stone creating many opportunities for learning and invaluable connections with other growers, they started contract raising on their own in November, 2001.



A squeeze chute is used to weigh animals & give shots safely.

Having contracts with three different farms provided Purvis with more than 275 Holstein calves to raise and



Purvis explains how an old water heater he mounted to the Kawasaki mule DVR provided makes for easy hauling of water and milk replacer to the calf hutches.

a need to make more adjustments at the farm. Among those changes, the use of hutches, no comingling of farms, and a new feed supplier became a must. Purvis' wife, Debbie, left work at the Marshfield Clinic and became an important part of the business' success as well, taking care of the bookwork and tasks that caused Purvis difficulty. She is glad to be working along side Jeff though, and credits their local co-op and Vita Plus for providing them with the support necessary to make Purvis Premier Calves go. “You can give them [Vita Plus] an A+,” said Debbie. “They are actually out there trying to help small farms.”



A calf catcher restrains calves for dehorning or giving medicine.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“Some people we work with are farming better because of our involvement, while Jeff is farming because of our involvement,” Leverenz proudly noted. He expressed further gratification in helping individuals to change their mindset so that he/she works to incorporate his/her disability into the continuous planning process. This is something that Purvis has demonstrated over and over again as he and his wife have evolved their business into what it is today.

Looking ahead, the Purvis' hope to add another barn allowing them to meet their goal of having five 1,000-cow farms for contract work. They continue to look into changing feed patterns and have discussed the possibility of doing artificial insemination (AI) though Leverenz warns that AI may be tough for a person with back problems. If there is a way, Purvis will probably find it.■

Editor's Note: Along with tools noted, a calf cart, hydraulic lift cart for lifting milk replacer bags, feed cart with bicycle tires, skid steer fork to move pallettes of feed and hutches among others help Purvis complete daily tasks with more ease.



SHARPENING "LIFE'S SAW"

It pays to take time to sharpen your saw if you're in the business of cutting down trees. Likewise, if you're a farm family under stress – and what farm family isn't these days - it pays to take time to get away from it all and sharpen your coping skills.

Beginning in November, eight farm couples weekend getaways were planned around the state to help farm families do just that. And there is no charge.

The remaining weekend getaways are scheduled for Jan. 18-19, 2003, Wausau; two sessions on Feb. 1-2, at Green Bay and Beaver Dam; Feb. 14-16, West Bend; Feb. 15-16, Dodgeville; and March 1, La Crosse.

“These weekend experiences are designed to help farm couples deal more effectively with stress and improve communication with each other as well as children,” said Kathy Schmitt, vocational coordinator for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. “The couples learn about useful community and state resources, plan for the future, and enjoy a mini vacation away from the farm and farm work.”

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Partners...

After working for DVR as a counselor for almost 20 years in an urban setting I transferred to a rural area of Wisconsin in December 2000. Having grown up on a small dairy farm and living in a small rural community for the past 12 years, I looked forward to learning new resources and services that would be available to assist farmers with disabilities.



AgrAbility has become one of the most important tools I have to assist farmers who want to remain in agribusiness. AgrAbility of Wisconsin is one of the resources I have come to know that is helping me along with my consumers to increase our knowledge of options to help people remain or become successfully employed in agribusiness.

People with disabilities living in rural areas have long used their own resources to create alternatives and solutions to problems they encounter in their vocational

and personal lives. Farmers have been especially creative in finding alternatives to allow them to continue in their chosen occupation. There is a point at which one person's knowledge of technology and resources can not provide all the answers. AgrAbility is one of the few resources available to farmers and other agricultural workers with disabilities that can fill that gap of service, providing them with expertise in adapting equipment, modifying farm operations, and using assistive technology.

Consumers who are assisted by AgrAbility find vocational rewards through working in their occupation of choice. The rural economy is benefiting from these consumers because they can stay on the farm or work in the rural community. The individual consumer's quality of life is enhanced. My job becomes more rewarding because I can see positive results. It is great to have AgrAbility as part of the team.

Paul Untiet

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

"Dozens of farm couples have participated in these seminars over the past five years," she added. "They have found the experience to be very beneficial."

Sponsored by the Sowing the Seeds of Hope Project, the weekends include refreshments, meals, lodging, materials and instruction. Weekend getaway participants are responsible for additional expenses they incur, such as phone calls, movies or pizza. However, they can apply for financial assistance to help cover the cost of travel, childcare and farm labor while they are away.

For more information about the getaway weekends or a registration brochure, call Roger Williams at 608-263-4432 or e-mail him at rwilliams@dcs.wisc.edu. Registration is limited to eight couples at each location, and reservations will be handled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Sowing The Seeds of Hope will also be sponsoring a Farm Family Weekend Getaway in Mosinee, WI on March 22-23 and a Farm Women's Weekend Getaway in West Bend, WI on March 28-30, 2003.

In addition, there is cost-free, confidential mental health counseling available to distressed Wisconsin farm families. More information is available by calling the Wisconsin Farm Center at 1-800-942-2474. ■



CAREGIVER'S CORNER

If you are a caregiver or know of someone who is, get your **free** copy of the Wisconsin Caregiver's Resource Book. It's full of tips on how to take care of yourself as well as your loved ones, and includes a county-by-county listing of support organizations in Wisconsin.

The guide is sponsored by Wisconsin Public Television as part of the Wisconsin Caregiver Coalition. To get your copy, call Wisconsin Public Television at 1-800-253-1158 or email them at outreach@wpt.org. ■





Farm Women Invited to Heart of the Farm Conferences

Five Heart of the Farm conferences designed for women in agriculture will take place throughout the state beginning December 2002 and continuing through March 2003. These conferences will provide educational sessions, agricultural resources and support networks for improving farm business decision-making.

At each conference, Kevin Bernhardt, UW-Platteville will be presenting, "Got Risk?" which will focus on increasing awareness about the risks you might be facing in your farming operation. Other educational sessions will highlight issues related to the challenges faced in many farm businesses.

- ♥ Jan 18 – UW-Richland Center, Richland Center, WI
- ♥ Feb 12 – Jefferson County Extension, Jefferson, WI
- ♥ Feb 20 – Rusk County Public Library, Ladysmith, WI
- ♥ March 6 – Ramada Inn Conf. Center, Eau Claire, WI

Roger Williams, Professor of Professional Development and Applied Studies, will conduct a session on Farm Family Communication focusing on specific things families can do to improve communications with all the members of the farm family team. Joy Kirkpatrick, Richland County Extension Dairy and Livestock Agent, and Rhonda Gildersleeve, Iowa



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County Extension Agriculture Agent, will discuss "Dealing with the 5 D's: divorce, death, disability, disaster, and disagreement." They will show how these events impact the family farm, how to prioritize the 5 D's, and how to develop contingency plans.

To find out more about the Heart of the Farm Conference series and program please visit the website at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/heartofthefarm> or contact your local UW-Extension Office.■

Heart of the Farm is supported by a grant from the North Central Risk Management Education Center and is sponsored by the UW-Extension Risk Management and Farm Management Education teams, the CHS Cooperative Foundation and the Cooperative Foundation.

Upcoming Winter Events

Stop & Visit AgrAbility at:

- ☆ 14th Fond du Lac Farm Show, Fond du Lac -- Jan 8-9
- ☆ 25th Midwest Farm Show, LaCrosse -- Jan 22-23
- ☆ 12th Barron County Farm Show, Rice Lake -- Jan 28-29
- ☆ Greater Green Bay Farm Show, Green Bay -- Feb 12-13
- ☆ 40th Eau Claire Farm Show, Eau Claire -- March 4-5
- ☆ Prof Dairy Producers of WI (PDPW), Madison -- Mar 11-12

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