

FUTURE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS MAKE FARMING CONNECTION

This winter, fifteen UW-LaCrosse Occupational Therapy (OT) students left the classroom behind to spend an afternoon out on the farm. With a majority of her OT students heading to rural areas for work, Professor Deborah Dougherty saw the value in introducing her class of seniors to AgrAbility and Rick Schmitz, a past program participant. Their visit to the Monroe County dairy farm provided students with an introduction to the AgrAbility program and its services, as well as information on



While at the Schmitz Farm, Professor Dougherty and her Occupational Therapy students enjoyed learning about assistive technology specific to farming, as well as increasing their awareness of a farmer's daily job tasks.

assistive technology (AT) available for farmers such as a hand truck, bedding chopper, feed cart, additional tractor steps, and personal utility vehicle. All of which are items that allow Schmitz to complete farm tasks with more ease. The "connections" didn't stop with the AT though. Only three of the students had ever been to a farm before with just one having grown up on a farm making the introduction of basic farming practices and daily tasks invaluable for these future rural professionals. ■

UPCOMING SPRING EVENTS

Stop & Visit AgrAbility at:

- ☆ WPS Farm Show, EAA Grounds, Oshkosh -- April 1-3
- ☆ WAEP Conference, Marriott, Middleton -- April 9-10
- ☆ Assistive Technology Conf., Radisson, LaCrosse -- Apr 17
- ☆ Iowa County Rural Safety Day Camp, Mineral Pt. -- May 6
- ☆ Assistive Technology Conf., Hilton, Oshkosh -- May 7
- ☆ Kewaunee County Safety Day Camp, Luxemburg -- May 22



Paul Leverenz, ESW, and Rick Schmitz highlight equipment and modifications made on the farm explaining to the students how these changes have helped Rick stay farming.

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AgrAbility of Wisconsin

Plowing Ahead

Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families



Spring 2003
Volume 11 No. 4

FEATURING:

"Teaming-Up" to Strengthen Services to Farmers

Whitmore, Behn and Welch Join Easter Seals FARM Program

Future Occupational Therapists Make Farming Connection

ALSO LOOK FOR:

Partners...
by Manuel Lugo, DVR

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

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"Teaming-Up" to Strengthen Services to Farmers

Gene Zimmerman puts on his gloves, throws on a thick coat and scarf to brace against the winter wind, and goes outside to greet the goats.

In the front yard of his home near Fox Lake is a goat amusement park of sorts, with ramps and things to crawl through. Goats get bored, he says, and happy goats are productive goats. Behind the house is another enclosure where more goats live, and behind that, a barn for the goats who are "expecting."

The tiniest goats, some only a day old, live in the warmest barn, snuggled up to their mothers and to sneaky little kittens. Gene likes to get close to the goats, pretending to kiss their curious-looking faces. It's clear that the relationship he has with them is one of mutual respect - he keeps them warm, fed and happy, and they supply him with the milk for goat cheese, a delicacy that Europeans have always enjoyed and Americans seem to have discovered only recently.

It's a good living that Gene has carved out, with his wife, Gwen, two daughters, Kiersten and Raisha, and their handful of huge St. Bernards. And Gene knows not to take it for granted. Farming is hard work - statistically, the most dangerous occupation in the United States. For Gene, who has

several debilitating medical conditions, farming very nearly became impossible.

It's hard for him to imagine doing anything else; he and his wife were both raised on farms. Unlike with other jobs, one can't just walk away from a farm and apply elsewhere. So when Gene's medical conditions made it harder and harder for him

to tend to the animals, he knew he needed some help. He found that help through AgrAbility of Wisconsin, a partnership program between UW-Extension Cooperative Extension and the Easter Seals Wisconsin Farm Assessment and Rehabilitation Methods program (FARM), formerly known as the Resource Center for Farmers with Disabilities (RCFD).



Gene's John Deere tractor makes moving around the farm much easier.

FARM, in partnership with Cooperative Extension has for the past twelve years worked collaboratively to form the AgrAbility program. This past fall, Easter Seals and FARM program staff entered into an agreement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to provide training to DVR staff, outreach to potential consumers and services to DVR consumers. Under this agreement, FARM will provide up to 72 farm site assessments this year (so far 30 have been requested) with the expectation that the program will expand even more in the years to come. FARM staff will also be

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providing information on issues facing farmers as well as the cultural aspects of farm family life through a series of trainings for DVR counselors. Among other things, these trainings will identify some of the special challenges counselors may face when working in the area of farming. "The DVR staff has had great success with farmers," says Leverenz. "With this training we can add the benefit of Easter Seals' experience of having worked with more than 1,000 farmers to help them continue to farm and achieve success in their farm operation."

The change from RCFD to FARM coupled with the DVR agreement, has allowed the program to grow three times bigger than it was previously. These changes benefit everyone involved including AgrAbility consumers as more clients can be served more quickly and with more resources. Three full-time positions have been added at Easter Seals Wisconsin – a technical assistant and two rural rehabilitation specialists. A computer database also helps match clients to community resources best able to help them.

Interestingly, not all FARM clients start out as farmers. "Some people have actually entered the field of agriculture because of limitations presented by a disability," says Leverenz. "They find out this is something they can do."

"The great thing about our program is it combines the strengths of all the organizations involved."

*-- Paul Leverenz
FARM Director, Easter Seals Wisconsin*

The agreement also calls for outreach to the agricultural community to provide a better understanding of the services DVR offers. The FARM program works in collaboration with the Wisconsin Farm Center, which performs farm financial feasibility studies for clients, along with some outreach. FARM extends its winning, long-time partnership with UW-Extension Cooperative Extension as they provide consumer outreach and evaluation services for FARM.

For Gene, the main problem was his knees, which had degenerated. "I've always had knee problems," he says, tracing them to an extreme growth spurt in childhood. In addition, Gene has an undiagnosed disease of the central nervous system, which causes

headaches and fevers. He never knows when the "attacks" will hit, and when they do, it becomes exceedingly difficult for him to tend to his 1,000 animals.

After evaluating the situation, AgrAbility/FARM staff recommended equipment to help, and DVR provided that equipment, including a gravity-flow feed bin that allows Gene's feed to be delivered in bulk thus diminishing the need to handle heavy feed bags, a Poly-Tuf feed cart to move feed with more ease than hauling pails, and a rock picker. Each of these items made it easier for Gene to continue his work with less stress to his knees, and with less overall effort so that his illness would

not make it impossible for him to work. The equipment has allowed Gene and his family to continue to live the life they have loved.

Ron Schuler, AgrAbility of Wisconsin Director, recognizes that farmers like Gene will attempt to press on despite illness or injury. "Without assistive devices, some of the farmers would discontinue farming, but many others would find other ways to manage," he says. "Those farmers would then be at a higher risk for secondary injuries." In addition, says Schuler, the farmers and their families would likely suffer financial ramifications because they would not be as productive as before.

"The great thing about our program is it combines the strengths of all the organizations involved," says Leverenz. "It uses them in a way that they are available to farmers to help them achieve their goals of continuing to farm. It's an exciting thing that we now have the resources and the partnership with DVR to do the assessment work."

Christine Fessler, Easter Seals CEO, agrees. "There is such a tremendous need for this program in the state," she says. "Easter Seals is pleased to have the opportunity to be able to respond to that need in a collaborative manner and so quickly and comprehensively." ■

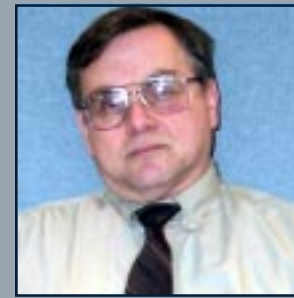
Editor's note: Article provided by Teresa Peneguy Paprock, Easter Seals Wisconsin.



An automatic feeding system and feed cart reduces carrying required for feeding the goats.

Partners...

"Agriculture is the backbone of Wisconsin's economy...agriculture generates around 40 billion a year for our economy. It accounts for one out of five jobs in Wisconsin."



These words from Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle, delivered in his 2003 budget address earlier this year, remind us all of the crucial role that agriculture plays in Wisconsin. From the small family-owned farm to the produce section of the local grocery store, agriculture touches all of us.

There are approximately 78,000 Wisconsin farms. As an occupation, farming has one of Wisconsin's highest incidences of work-related injuries and death. Every year approximately 5-8% of farmers are disabled by farm injuries, resulting in 3,900 or more potential Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) consumers.

That's why the DVR is so proud to be a partner with Easter Seals Wisconsin in providing services to farmers with disabilities.

DVR has served Wisconsin farmers and agricultural workers with disabilities for many years. However, planning for an individual to return to farming work after an injury, or the onset of disability, or planning for an individual with a disability to enter the agricultural field present special challenges for the Division.

To help address these challenges, DVR entered an agreement with Easter Seals Wisconsin to become partners in a comprehensive statewide project, Farm Assessment and Rehabilitation Methods (FARM) for farmers and agricultural workers with disabilities in Wisconsin.

That's what DVR is all about—helping people with disabilities reach or maintain their job goals. The FARM project provides the opportunity to more effectively serve farmers and other agricultural workers with disabilities and to reach individuals in this population who might not otherwise know that they could turn to DVR as a resource.

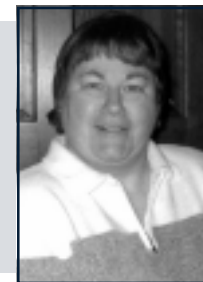
The relationship between Easter Seals and DVR allows staff from the two agencies to work cooperatively with farmers with disabilities to determine their goals and develop a plan that will assist them in reaching those goals and continue the important work they do.

-- Manuel Lugo

WHITMORE, BEHN AND WELCH JOIN EASTER SEALS FARM PROGRAM



Bruce Whitmore joined Easter Seals as a rural rehabilitation specialist in November 2002. He has a BS degree in technical agriculture from UW-Platteville and a master's degree in education with a vocational emphasis. He has been an owner and operator of a family dairy, crop and beef farm; taught vocational agriculture at Brodhead High School; and served as the farm and grounds manager at St. Coletta of Wisconsin. "The part I like most about my job so far is that I get to meet farmers and try to help them make their lives better," he says.



Tricia Behn joined Easter Seals as a rural rehabilitation specialist in November 2002. She is a graduate of UW-Madison with a BS degree in occupational therapy and is currently enrolled in a master's program in health care administration. Tricia grew up and worked on her family's dairy and livestock farm in Sauk County. She has been an instructor at Madison Area Technical College and worked for 24 years as an occupational therapist for the Sauk County Health Care Center. Farm assessments are a highlight for Tricia who says, "I enjoy meeting people and helping in any way I can to reduce the challenges keeping them from their productive farm roles."



Brooke Welch joined Easter Seals as a technical assistant for the FARM program in November 2002. Along with her outgoing personality, she has a strong computer skills. Brooke grew up on a farm and says she enjoys her position because she likes working with farmers. She is a "farm person" at heart making her a great fit for the program.

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