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Courtesy photo

Manzanola farmer, Bert Nesselhuf tries out his new Kawasaki Mule provided by the joint efforts of Easter Seals Colorado, AgrAbility project, the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the AV Hunter Trust and the Friends of Man. The four wheeler will allow Nesselhuf to once again get out to the fields on his Arkansas Valley farm.

Groups team up to assist Ark Valley farmer with mobility

By MARY BRESLIN
LDN Editor

MANZANOLA, CO - Third generation farmer, Bert Nesselhuf, loves the land and the challenges involved with being a farmer. Five years ago though, he was faced with a new challenge that didn't have anything to do with the weather, sagging prices, the cost of fuel or any of the usual issues faced by farmers everywhere.

Stricken with multiple sclerosis, and later suffering a broken leg, Nesselhuf became dependent on a wheelchair to get around. Even though the family was able to obtain a mini-van that was modified to accommodate his wheelchair, the six inch clearance on the bottom of the van made it virtually

useless for getting out to the fields to check on his crops.

A friend saw the problem and called Jason Beck, AgrAbility Project Coordinator with Easter Seals Colorado (ESC), setting in motion a quest to help Nesselhuf regain the mobility so vital to his way of life. AgrAbility, sponsored by the Colorado State University Extension, has teamed up with ESC to help farmers, ranchers and their families to stay active in the life they love.

Beck set to work on evaluating how the program could help Nesselhuf and came up with a plan that would allow him to better use the electric wheelchair donated by ESC. Beck located the Kawasaki

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Mule, a rugged, four wheel vehicle and set about the work of arranging to have the vehicle modified in a way that would allow Nesselhuf to drive his wheelchair onto it, using a ramp, without any other assistance.

Nesselhuf says the new equipment will make it much more practical for him to get out and see what's happening on his 300 acre farm.

Nesselhuf's wife, Ellen said, "This has opened a whole new world to him, and has improved the quality of his life 100%."

The couple agreed that in order to manage the farm, it's vital to be able to see the crops and fields first-hand. Only then can it be determined if the hay is ready to cut or there is an infestation of insects, for example. "The field hands are good, but they just don't have the years of experience that Bert has," said his wife.

"They (EAC) really cared, and worked with us to come up with a solution said Ellen Nesselhuf. "We are very grateful."

Pilar Chapa, marketing communications director for Easter Seals Colorado, said, "We really want to get the word out that there is a lot that we can do to help people who are dealing with disabilities." Individuals who would like to inquire about services available from ESC should contact Jason Beck at ESC by calling (303) 233-1666, Extension 224.