

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



In Spite of Nerve Damage, Farmer Keeps on Farming  
*AgrAbility Project Helps Ag Workers with Disabilities*

Hartsel, Colorado September 2016 – One sign that you have strong farm roots is deciding to retire and then start farming.

Dean Wierth in Hartsel, Colorado, west of Colorado Springs, lives on a farm where he raises Spanish goats for meat. It's the work he always hoped he could do in retirement as he remembers spending days as a young man raising cattle, working the fields, and repairing machinery. Dean has done about everything in farming and ranching at one time or another, and he settled on a goat meat production and kidding operation in the beautiful mountains of Colorado.

He followed his dream, building his most recent farm operation. But that path was significantly interrupted nearly four years ago.

His challenges began with pain and tingling in his legs and feet. Then it progressed to balance and coordination issues, which limited his ability to walk without assistance. Wierth visited his doctor who initially diagnosed the symptoms as being related to nerve damage or peripheral neuropathy of his feet and hands. Why this was happening was unclear, and how to deal with the pain and limited mobility was unclear as well. The effects can vary, and in Wierth's case it was devastating.

Wierth faced each day unsure of the impact the neuropathy would have on him. "At first you have no feeling or nothing in your hands and feet, and at times the pain is unbearable," he said. "Not able to feel your feet and know where you are placing them leaves you pretty limited in traveling to and from your livestock several times each day." When Wierth first contacted the AgrAbility project he had just lost nearly his entire kid crop due to the unusual spring weather and inability to access his livestock due to his physical limitations.

Wierth did not know whether he could continue farming since experiencing the physical limitations. But when he reached out to the Colorado AgrAbility Project he knew, "I just always liked to farm," he said. "You get out there and you're by yourself and you do what you want to do. It's good therapy, and with Candy Leather's help and recommendations from the Colorado AgrAbility Project, and the significant assistance from the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation he has continued with his goals and dreams." Despite his disability and his struggle to regain his balance, strength, and coordination, he just didn't want to consider that he could not farm and ranch.

### **About Colorado AgrAbility Project**

Colorado State University Extension and Goodwill Industries of Denver work together on the Colorado AgrAbility Project to provide disability workshops, on-site evaluations, resource information, equipment modification and assistive technology. The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides funding for the Colorado AgrAbility Project.

Colorado AgrAbility is a part of a national program that helps farmers and ranchers overcome disabilities to stay on the land. Through the assistance and guidance of the AgrAbility Project, and working closely with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Wierth was able to secure a utility vehicle to help allow him access to his pastures, corrals, and livestock. A livestock handling system designed for optimum use by only a single person improved his ability to independently work his livestock. While he can't do as much as he used to, he has benefited from numerous pieces of equipment that help him with raising goats, birthing kids, and tending his animals safely and efficiently. He remains independent in his livestock maintenance, and is optimistic about what the future holds.

### **About Goodwill Industries of Denver**

Goodwill Industries of Denver seeks to reverse the cycle of poverty through career preparation and skills training for at-risk youth, struggling families and individuals with disabilities.

Through its thrift retail operations and community programs, Goodwill is ensuring that every individual in our community has the opportunity to live to their fullest potential and overcome barriers to success and self-sufficiency. Visit [www.goodwilldenver.org](http://www.goodwilldenver.org) to learn more.

### **Winter Workshops 2016-2017**

Below is a list of upcoming workshops that will be presented by Dr. Norman L. Dalsted, CSU Extension and by Candiss Leathers and Dr. James Craig, Goodwill Industries of Denver.

"AgrAbility, How to Work Well with Agricultural Lenders and Bankers" and "Mental Wellness for Rural America" will be the topics. The workshops are for Colorado farm and ranch families who are dealing with barriers created by illnesses, conditions, or limitations, and for professionals who work with them. Workshops are from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. with a free box lunch provided for those who pre-register at least one week prior to the workshop. If you want to participate, please call or email Candiss Leathers (720-539-4435); [cleathers@goodwilldenver.org](mailto:cleathers@goodwilldenver.org), or Norm Dalsted (970 222-5657); [Norman.Dalsted@ColoState.EDU](mailto:Norman.Dalsted@ColoState.EDU) or the Extension agent listed below for more information no later than one week prior to the workshop.

- **Buena Vista:** October 27th, 2016, Sangre De Cristo Electric Association, 29780 North Highway 24, Buena Vista, CO., with Kurt Jones (719-539-6447).
- **Trinidad:** November 15th, 2016, Pioneer Room in the Sullivan Student Center at Trinidad State Junior College, 600 Prospect St, Trinidad, CO 81082Trinidad, with Dean Oatman (719-846-6881).
- **Pueblo:** November 16th, 2016, County Extension Office, 701 Court St. Pueblo, CO. 81003 with Tom Laca (719-583-6566).
- **Walden:** November 29th, 2016, Wattenberg Center, 686 CR 42 Walden, with Debbie Alpe (970-723-4298).
- **Delta:** January 18th, 2017, County Courthouse, 501Palmer St. Delta, Co. 81416, Rm #234, with Doug Dean,(970-244-1834)

- **Aurora:** February 8th, 2017, 25690 E Quincy Ave, Aurora, CO 80016, with Johnathan Vrbeck, (719-661-2286)
- **Yuma:** February 14th, 2017, Concession Building at the Yuma County Fairgrounds, 2520 E 32nd St, Yuma, AZ 85365 , with Dennis Kaan, (970-345-2287, Mobile: 970-520-1826).
- **Sterling:** February 15, 2017, County Extension Office, 508 South 10th Ave. Sterling, CO. 80751 with Dennis Kaan (Voice: 970-345-2287, Mobile: 970-520- 1826)