



## Vocational Rehab available to help farmers with disabilities

Vocational Rehabilitation can offer services to farmers and ranchers with disabilities that assist them in finding ways to regain or maintain their employment in agriculture.

The first step an individual must take is applying for services. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can then determine whether an individual is eligible for services.

Once eligibility has been determined the counselor and client can work together to determine the types of services that are most suitable for the client. This process usually results in a written rehabilitation plan that identifies the client's vocational goal, VR services, and

funding needed to attain the goal.

Although VR staff services are free, individuals are encouraged to participate and contribute to their rehabilitation plan if they can afford to. Particularly in agricultural occupations, assistive technology needs can often be quite expensive. Availability of funds from VR varies.

AgrAbility staff recommend generating as many potential funding solutions as possible to acquire the needed assistive technology resources.

Other VR services include:

- Vocational testing and assessment

- Vocational guidance and counseling
- Training or education funding
- And more....

Contact information for the nearest Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation office can be located in the state government pages of the phone book or on the web: [www.cdhs.state.co.us/ods/dvr/](http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/ods/dvr/)



## History of Voc Rehab Services

The very first Vocational Rehabilitation Act was signed into law in 1920 to assist veterans with disabilities from WWI who needed assistance in finding gainful employees.

Today's VR is operated under the Rehabilitation

Act of 1973. The program has been modified to help people with disabilities return to work that need assistance in doing so.

Each state has a VR program which is funded by federal and state monies.

In Colorado, vocational rehabilitation counselors undergo extensive educational preparation to prepare them for working with people with disabilities who want to gain or maintain employment.

The mission of Colorado VR is to "assist individuals whose disabilities result in barriers to employment or independent living to obtain or maintain employment and to live independently."

**THIS NEWSLETTER IS AVAILABLE IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS, CALL 1-800-335-2598, EXT. 233**

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# Recommendations for working well with your Voc Rehab Counselor.....

Caryn Spreeman is a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Limon, Colorado. It is her goal to assist people with disabilities in overcoming barriers to employment. Caryn approaches her work with serious commitment to the community she serves. In a recent interview with Colorado AgrAbility, she provides insight to the key processes that lead to a successful collaboration between a DVR counselor and a consumer of vocational rehabilitation services.

**Q.** AgrAbility: What do you feel are the key factors in establishing a successful collaboration with a vocational rehabilitation consumer?

**A.** Caryn: The key piece in my mind is—That the person is motivated to work! Second, it helps if the person knows what they want to do, what they realistically can do, and what their limitations are. Finally, are they willing to explore various options to reach their goal?

**Q.** Such as?

**A.** Such as, what type of alternative ways are there of doing the job,? Are they open to different ways of doing things, or making accommodations that will help them do a job? In other words—is that person willing and able to be adaptable?

**Q.** What other factors are important in working with the VR counselor?

**A.** Communication is also important.. Since most VR counselors have a large

case load and travel a lot, it helps if the consumer maintains monthly contact with us. A voice mail that says: “hey, I’m having some trouble” or “things are working well” are very important to the counselor.

Also, when beginning the VR process, it is very helpful if the consumer has medical information on hand that can help us determine eligibility. At the very least, having accurate information about your doctor’s name and address and where

*“I have a great appreciation for farmers and ranchers. They are very hardworking people!”*  
*Caryn Spreeman, DVR*

medical treatment and services were provided. Another thing I’ll mention is the need to be open and honest about disclosing information to your counselor. We hold the information in confidence. Sometimes when a person withholds information some crucial service they may need gets left out of the plan. Ultimately, it may affect the employment outcome the person is seeking.

**Q.** What have you learned from working with farmers and ranchers in your area?

**A.** I’m from a bigger city than Limon, and I didn’t have a lot of first hand knowledge of farming and ranching when I came here. I’ve come to have a great appreciation for farmers and ranchers. They are very hardworking people. Many of us take for granted that they produce

our food, contribute to the economy, and actually contribute to our well-being!

**Q.** What have you learned in working with farmers and ranchers who are impacted by disability issues?

**A.** They know what it is to work hard! They are motivated to continue working and are open to making adaptations. These are people who have multiple skills for numerous job tasks on the farm.

**Q.** How do you see AgrAbility assisting your consumers who are working in agriculture?

**A.** When working with consumers who are farming, I rely on AgrAbility for information. I take their recommendations very seriously. AgrAbility is willing to go out and spend the day with a farmer and work with them to determine what kind of assistive technology, modifications, and accommodations are needed to continue working on the farm. I think DVR and AgrAbility work very well collaborating with each other and more importantly, with the consumer.

**Q.** Thanks Caryn. The staff at AgrAbility appreciate the way you have worked diligently to find the resources needed by farmers and ranchers with disabilities. You are always on task and we like how you get things done in a timely way. I also think the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has been very supportive of people who want to enter, maintain, or continue working in agriculture. DVR services can make it possible!

## ....and if things don’t go well, how to utilize the Client Assistance Program

It doesn’t happen often, but sometimes if things don’t go as expected with Vocational Rehabilitation it might be time for a client to contact the Client Assistance Program.(CAP)

The Client Assistance Program is an independent advocacy program designed to help people with questions, concerns, and problems regarding rehabilitation programs in Colorado. These programs in-

clude:

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Centers for Independent Living
- Migratory Worker Projects
- Other programs receiving Rehabilitation Services Administration funds.

In Colorado these services are provided

by The Legal Center for People with Disabilities and Older People. They can be contacted at:

1-800-288-1376

Western Slope: 1-800-531-2105

Or on the Web:

[Www.thelegalcenter.org](http://www.thelegalcenter.org)

# Rangeland Weed Sprayer teams up with AgrAbility and Vocational Rehabilitation to keep working after illness

Colorado cattlemen know they have to ride herd on a big problem facing all western landowners— Noxious weeds! Noxious weeds like leafy spurge, toad-flax, and knapweed are infesting thousands of acres of rangeland every year making it unsuitable for grazing. Though some attempt to manage the problem on their own, many land managers depend on weed management professionals like Richard “Rick” Alford.

For eight years, Rick has been running his own “one man” licensed spraying business “Reliable Pest Control” in Montrose, Colorado working closely with land managers all over the Western Slope for weed eradication and management. The work takes him from river bottom ranches to the rocky alpine slopes of 10,000 feet mountains.

His professional career was jeopardized in the Fall of 1999 when Rick was hospitalized for vascular problems in both legs secondary to a medical condition called Anti-thrombin III Deficiency. The condition caused Rick’s blood to clot abnormally, and both legs were seriously impeded from getting blood. He was hospitalized for several months and was gravely ill. “There were several times I almost died and was really out of it (unconscious) and unaware of how ill I really was”, Rick says.

Eventually the loss of blood circulation in Rick’s legs caused irreparable damage and his left leg was amputated above the knee. Rick began the long process of physical rehabilitation at Denver’s Veterans Hospital. During his rehabilitation his case manager suggested **AgrAbility** as a resource.

When AgrAbility staff met with Rick at the hospital, he was still learning how to walk with a prosthetic leg and walking with a cane, but he was already envisioning how to accomplish his goals of working and living as fully as possible with his family. Rick and the AgrAbility staff decided a work-site

assessment needed to be conducted after his hospital discharge.

Rick spent several hours with the AgrAbility occupational therapist out in the field demonstrating his functional abilities and also exploring ideas to compensate for his loss of mobility. Safety issues were also given important consideration. Rick prioritized his needs and goals and he was referred to the **Colorado Division of Rehabilitation**. He was found to be eligible for

funding for the spraying rig and new chemical tanks he needed and Rick added an ATV and newer 4WD pickup truck to his work operation.

In addition, Rick was fitted with a new computer knee technology through the Veteran’s Hospital that has dramatically improved his mobility. He can walk on uneven surfaces, stairs, and hills without the constant worry of falling.



*Rick is... "motivated to succeed...he wants to work!"*  
*Phil Romero-DVR Counselor*

their services.

Rick updated his business plan and financial projections as a part of his plan of employment with Vocational Rehabilitation. The assistive technology equipment Rick needed most was also identified: a spraying rig that would allow him to operate controls from inside his truck and an ATV with a spray rig for accessing remote and rugged terrain to conduct work and supervision activities. Vocational rehabilitation was able to assist Rick with

Rick credits AgrAbility as being a significant help in providing advocacy, information, a sounding board for ideas, and assistance in justifying assistive technology needs. “AgrAbility gets people thinking about what will help them, it may be something different, or even more cumbersome, but it lets them know the world is open to them.”

Of Vocational Rehabilitation, Rick says the services of the program were invaluable in getting the equipment he needed to access areas he could not get to after his leg amputation. He credits them as essential in getting him back to work in a way that is competitive with

(cont. page 4)

# Independent Living Centers provide services to people with disabilities

Centers for Independent Living (CIL) are consumer-controlled, community based, nonresidential private non-profit agencies that are designed to assist people living with significant disabilities with independent living services.

The philosophy of each centers is consumer control of decision-making, self-help and self-advocacy, development of peer relationships and peer role models, and equal access and opportunity to society by people with significant disabilities, regardless of whether the disability is physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory (vision, hearing).

Independent Living Centers were created through Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Colorado has 9 Independent Living Centers that provide four core services:

- Information and referral
- Peer-counseling
- Individual and systems advocacy
- Independent living skills training

Each center may provide other services designed to meet the needs of their community. Usually these services are supported by grants or community foundations. For instance, services may be available at some centers in the areas of housing, finding assistive equipment, mobility training, basic education,

other weed sprayers who do not have disabilities.

Rick also credits his wife Teri and daughter Ariel as important sources of support. They were a big motivation for surviving and working hard through his hospitalization, rehabilitation, and return to home and community.

Carla Wilhite, Rick’s AgrAbility occupational therapist believes that Rick has taught her a lot as well. “He has shown me that adjusting and adapting isn’t a process with an endpoint, but it continues throughout our lifespan, regardless of whether we have a disability or not. Success in all aspects of living is an ongoing process.”

When asked to define success Risk says, “success is trying to live a positive life...and do something that’s worthwhile”. Trying to bring the land back into balance and pristine condition is part of his vision of what is worthwhile, but more importantly, it is found in the life he shares with family, friends, and community.

*AgrAbility is available at no cost for home and work assessments for people working in agriculture who are impacted by disability, severe illness, and physical limitations thanks to a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture.*

tutoring, recreation, transition services, and independent living placement, etc. **To find out about these services contact the center nearest you:**

## Colorado Centers for Independent Living

**Atlantis**  
201 S. Cherokee St.  
Denver, CO 80233  
303-733-9324

**Center for Independence**  
1600 Ute Ave.  
Grand Junction, CO 81501  
970-241-0315

**Center for People With Disabilities**  
948 North St. #7  
Boulder, CO 80304  
303-442-8662

**Colorado Springs Independence Center**  
21 E. Las Animas  
Colorado Springs, CO 80903  
719-471-8181

**Connections for Independent Living**  
1024 9th Ave. #E  
Greeley, CO 80631  
970-352-8672

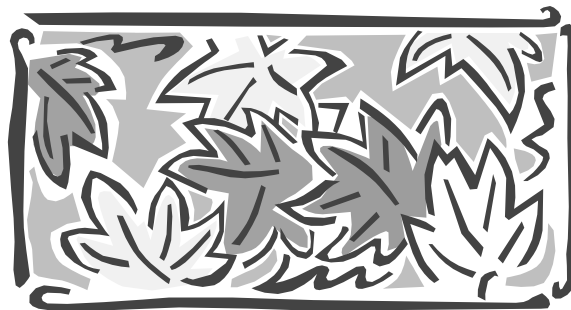
**Center for Independent Living**  
6007 W. 16th Ave.  
Denver, CO 80226  
303-233-4056

**Disabled Resource**  
424 Pine St. #101  
Fort Collins, CO 80524  
970-482-2700

**Sangre De Cristo Independent Living Center**  
803 W. 4th.  
Pueblo, CO 81003  
719-546-1271

**Southwest Center for Independence**  
801 Florida Rd. #3  
Durango, CO 81301

**Independent Life Center**  
P.O. Box 612  
Craig, CO 81626  
970-826-0832



*Centers for Independence are serving Coloradan's across the state!*



*Creating solutions, changing lives.*

**Easter Seals Colorado  
5755 W. Alameda Ave.  
Lakewood, CO 80226**

***Strengthening our community one  
life at a time...***

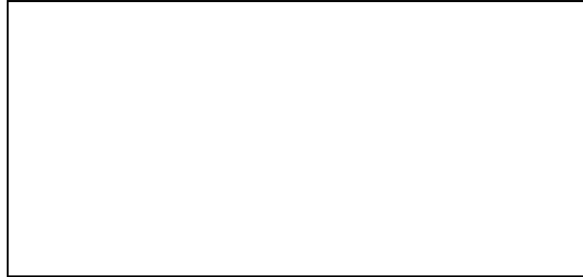
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## Make a Donation to support AgrAbility Services

Consider making a tax deductible gift now to support AgrAbility services in Colorado! Your contribution will assist farmers, ranchers, and their family members who are impacted by disabilities acquire the adaptive technology and equipment modifications they need to continue working in agriculture or in living with greater independence at home.

Funds from the AgrAbility grant cannot be used to purchase equipment for individuals, so your state project depends on you to lend a hand! Your gift will make it possible to purchase:

- Extra stairs or handrails on a tractor or combine
- Low vision aids
- Bathroom grab bars
- Convert foot controls to hand controls
- And other adaptive aids...

### DONATION FORM

Yes, I want to make a donation to assist people with disabilities succeed in agriculture!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please find enclosed my donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_.



Make check payable to:

Easter Seals Colorado-AgrAbility Project  
5755 W. Alameda Ave.  
Lakewood, CO 80226

### FREE USED POWER CHAIR

We have an "as is" tilt in space power wheelchair available with La Bac frame and Invacare motor components. The chair has a headrest, high back, and remove-able foot rests. It is operated with a joy stick control. The chair comes with a custom foam seat. The chair fits an individual of approximately 6ft in height. Please call Carla Wilhite, occupational therapist for Colorado AgrAbility if you are interested in this chair. **Ph: 1-800-335-2598**

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