



Client Story *Going Up—Next Stop, Tractor Cab!*

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Ron B. operates a hay farm on Colorado's eastern plains. Over the past few years he's found himself not getting around as easily as he used to. He has post-polio syndrome and also a history of surgeries on both rotator cuffs. The post-polio limits his walking ability while the effects of the shoulder surgeries prevent him from using his arms to help climb the steps of his tractor even with handrails available. He contacted Colorado AgrAbility to get some ideas on how he might work around this challenge.

The AgrAbility staff visited Ron at his farm to get a detailed look at the situation. Our occupational therapist assessed Ron's strength and range of motion. Ron also explained more about what he is and isn't able to do around the farm. His priority remained being able to access his articulating tractor for seeding and harvesting. AgrAbility presented Ron with a range of possibilities to choose from to solve this problem, including finding a way to obtain a hydraulic lift for his tractor.



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About Colorado AgrAbility Project

The Colorado AgrAbility Project is a partnership between Colorado State University Extension and Easter Seals Colorado funded by a grant from the USDA.

- **History:** The AgrAbility Project was written into the 1990 Farm Bill. Currently 22 states offer this project.
- **Mission:** Promote Independence in Agriculture.
- **Serve:** Any farmer, rancher, or family member who has a disability, injury, or illness who has difficulty with activities in the home or on the farm/ranch and lives within the state of Colorado.
- **Provide:** On-site assessments from an occupational therapist, make recommendations for assistive technology, home modifications and equipment adaptations, research funding sources, offer peer support through our Neighbor-to-Neighbor Support program, and provide referrals to other professionals that can help with physical, emotional, and mental health needs.
- **All services from Colorado AgrAbility Project are free of cost!**

Cont. Client Story

The lift would provide an elevator-like platform for Ron to ride up to the cab and back down to the ground. Ron chose to work with a local fabricator, Jeff Wilson at J & R Bennett Welding. Jeff worked with Ron to create a lift that met Ron's needs.

Getting a recommendation for new equipment is one thing, but paying for it can be another. To help Ron defray the cost of his lift Colorado AgrAbility helped leverage the assistance of others. We've set up a special account funded exclusively by donations to the Colo-

rado AgrAbility Project. Once in the account--called the PARTNERS Program--the money is restricted to specifically help pay for assistive technology for farm/ranch families. AgrAbility helped Ron apply to the fund and we presented the case to our Approval Committee. Within days a check was mailed to help defray the cost of the lift.

Ron says Jeff "really did a nice job" on the lift and it has indeed provided him with the ability to keep using that tractor.

Ron reports the lift is working well and has accomplished the goal of enabling him to keep using that tractor for his farming duties.

PARTNERS Program

Last year Colorado AgrAbility designed the PARTNERS Program, which was started in December 2008 with a grant from the Spalding Community Foundation. This program provides financial support for assistive technology or modifications to equipment for Colorado farming and ranching families who have sustained an injury, illness, or condition that prevents them from their work.

AgrAbility's federal grant does not allow funding to be used for the purchase or acquisition of adaptive equipment. Prior to the PARTNERS Program, AgrAbility staff was limited to making recommendations and referrals for adaptive

equipment. Often these referrals and connections were not sufficient to meet a client's need. With PARTNERS, clients can apply for small amounts – up to \$1000 – to help fill the gap left by insurance, workers comp, or other support resources.

Since December 2008, AgrAbility has been able to provide assistance in defraying the cost of assistive technology (AT) for ten farm and ranch families in 8 different counties across Colorado. Another nine applications are pending.

Any AgrAbility client or family is eligible for the PARTNERS Program once recommendations have been identified by AgrAbility Staff.

Statewide Resources

Contact Information

Colorado DVR:
303-866-5700

Social Security:
1-800-772-1213

Colorado FSA:
720-544-2876

Colorado DVR

Mission: "The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assists individuals whose abilities result in barriers to employment to succeed at work and live independently."

Colorado DVR has 19 offices throughout the state. If you are having difficulty returning to work after an injury, condition, or illness Colorado DVR may be able to help.

Social Security Disability Benefits

Social security pays disability benefits under two different programs; Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

They also have programs to help you get back to work without losing your social security benefits.

Colorado FSA

Mission: "To help Colorado famers and ranchers secure the highest possible financial assistance from USDA programs and to play a vital role in the economic survival of Colorado rural communities."

There are Farm Service Agencies located in counties around the state. Contact the number provided for more information.

Rehabilitating the CO Farmer & Rancher Workshop

The 3rd annual workshop will be June 26-27, 2009, and held at Colorado State University's Agricultural Research Development and Educational Center (ARDEC) in Ft. Collins, CO.

The training will provide attendees with both time in the classroom and the exposure to a working farm and ranch to learn practical interventions to promote the independence of farm and ranch family members affected by disabilities.

The workshop is open to therapists, Extension personnel, VR

Professionals, or others that work with farmers and ranchers.

Continuing education has been approved from the American Occupational Therapy Association and Colorado State University for 1.5 CEUs, or 15 contact hours.

Presenters will be CO AgrAbility staff, Carla Wilhite, assistant professor at University of North Dakota-Casper College OT Department, and staff from De-

partment of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Cost is \$150 for professionals and \$60 for students which covers educational materials, three meals, and snacks.

The course has been accepted by the American Occupational Therapy Association single course approval.

Look for our post-workshop report with photos, reviews (well, the good ones at least) and audience reactions in the Fall 2009 issue of the Baling Wire!



Quotes



“Craig Hospital truly appreciates the services of the Colorado AgrAbility Project. Our farm families have concerns in regard to how they’ll get around the farm or operate their farm equipment once they get back home. The knowledge AgrAbility provides to our patients enables them to regain the confidence that they can return to productive farming and, above all, do it safely. I have seen the smiles on our patients’ faces when they realize that with the aid of Colorado AgrAbility they can return to the lifestyle they love.” - *Joe Gomez, Therapeutic Recreation Department Director, Craig Hospital*

"I found the training to be the best I have received regarding using personal and practical examples that are highly relevant and easy to understand and apply. The materials I received and the "hands on" experiences will assist me when working with the farmer/rancher in the future. I have recommended all staff in my region to attend the training in the future." - *Candiss Leathers, M.A., Regional Program Supervisor II North*

Are Your Gates Difficult to Open?

Getting gates open and closed is one of the challenges reported frequently by the people we meet in our travels. Here are a few solutions. Keep in mind there are more out there to meet your specific need and type of gate.



A one-handed gate latch can be an inexpensive way to modify existing gates to provide easier access whether you're on foot or on horseback. At left is just one example—there are many variations on this idea.

Deluxe Gate Latch photo from valleyvet.com



Some gate options eliminate the need to get off and on your tractor each time you pass through a gate. In the example at right a vehicle can push through the spring-loaded arms, but livestock won't go through because parts of the gate are electrified. The green areas are safe to touch by hand.

Automatic Drive-Through Gate photo from farneasier.com



Powered gate openers are available for agricultural settings as well. These can be activated by remote control, by actuators on the ground which you drive over, or even sensors buried beneath the surface. Some offer optional solar panels to recharge the battery power supply.

Mighty Mule 350 photo from mightymule.com



Colorado AgrAbility does *not* endorse any particular product or manufacturer.

What we *do* is present you with ideas like these that might help you keep doing the tasks you need to. That gives you some options to choose from to suit your particular situation. Once you decide on the right choice for you, we help you make it happen!

Ag-Specific Training for Future Therapists

If you know anything about AgrAbility you realize we provide certain kinds of *direct* help to Colorado farm & ranch families. Another priority of ours is to provide education to other professionals who work with people involved in agriculture. One of the ways we do this is by making our program available to occupational therapy (OT) students as a way to gain practical experience in the field before they graduate and head into the "real world."

Students pursuing an OT degree are required to do field-work before graduating.

Assignments may last from 40 hours to 12 weeks. Colorado AgrAbility is one option a student may choose as a way to fulfill part of these requirements. Project Manager Jill Sump has a master's degree in occupational therapy and maintains connections at several universities as an Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Supervisor. Under her guidance students learn how to put their academic training into real-life practice. While here, the students become part of the Colorado AgrAbility team--helping out with more and more as they gain experience. Along the way

they also have to complete specific assignments directed by their school and special projects overseen by Jill.

The setting in which any given OT student will eventually choose to practice is likely to be very different than AgrAbility. The students' time with us is intended to give a unique insight into the special considerations for their farm/ranch clients, as well as to show that there are a lot of assistive technology options available to help with agricultural tasks.

**OT Students
Summer-Fall '09**

Be looking for work from these students:

**Stephanie Carpenter–
Colorado State University**

**Katie Smyth–
Creighton University**

**Rachel Bomsta–
Colorado State University**

Adaptive Gardening– Stephanie Carpenter, OTS

Adaptive Tools



Easi-Grip Handle



Enabling Trowel



D-Grip & T-Grip

Adapted Tools

If your body just can't handle gardening like it used to, there are a variety of adapted tools and ways to modify existing tools out there. These tools can provide added stability, decrease uncomfortable positions, and reduce pain associated with gardening. You can find trowels, cultivators, hoes, and forks with a 90 degree ergonomic design handle or with forearm support. Additionally, larger tools such as shovels can be bought with D and T- grips for added stability. No matter the size, "add-on handles" can also be purchased for your favorite tool at home. I would also suggest using a gardening bench. There are cool designs out there that can be turned upside down to use as a kneeling pad and include handles to assist in standing up.

Raised Garden Beds

Raised garden beds make gardening more accessible by bringing your garden to a more convenient height. They eliminate the need to bend over or crouch down and allow you to garden from a seated position. A variety of materials can be used to create a raised garden such as bricks, wooden planks, or even water troughs. The great thing is that you can create them to your personal specifications. If you aren't quite sure about raised beds, hanging baskets or container gardening also make growing your favorite plants easier.

To accommodate for mobility devices, pathways should be about four ft. across to allow for safe maneuvering. If you want to reach your beds from a seated position, beds should be no wider than two ft. across for reaching from one side or

four ft. if reaching from either side, and the height should be no higher than 21 inches.

Both raised beds and adapted tools are great for those with mobility challenges, joint and back pain, or any difficulties with reaching.

If you can't find adaptive tools in your local store you can search Google using the following terms:

Sure Grip, Ergonomic, Enabling, Earth Bud-Eze, Kneeler bench, D-Grip, T-Grip, Add-on Handles

For more information contact Colorado AgrAbility.



Colorado AgrAbility Project

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We're on the Web!!

<http://www.agrability.cahs.colostate.edu/>

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