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AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians is a statewide partnership between Penn State Extension and UCP Central PA. *Field Notes* is mailed twice a year by UCP in partnership with Penn State Extension.

PennState Extension



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CULTIVATING ACCESSIBLE AGRICULTURE
one farm family at a time



Upcoming Events

Look for AgrAbility PA at these events and more!
More details at www.AgrAbilityPA.Wordpress.com.

AG PROGRESS DAYS
August 15 - 17, 2017
Penn State University
Located at the Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center
Pennsylvania's largest outdoor agricultural exposition

HORSE PROGRESS DAYS
June 30 - July 1, 2017
35 Brethren Church Road
Leola, PA
Field demonstrations showcase the latest horse drawn equipment



At left, Project Assistant Abbie Spackman represented the National AgrAbility Project and AgrAbility PA at the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Conference this spring in Philadelphia. While there, she shared garden-related assistive technology with attendees.

IMPROVED WORKFLOW LEADS TO ENHANCED FARM LIVING

Todd Zimmerman knows all about the benefits of working with an occupational therapist (OT) to ease his pain and better his workflow around the farm. He had the opportunity through AgrAbility PA and the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to receive on-farm visits from a licensed OT practitioner in 2008 and 2016.

On the surface, the story is a familiar one: Farmer has work to attend to on the farm, but experiences pain and discomfort due to a disability or long-term health condition. In Todd's case, a back injury in 1991 coupled with degenerative disc disease that has taken its toll on his spine over the years.



Todd owns a dairy goat farm, Four Zimm Dairy Plus, in Union County, selling raw milk and making homemade goat milk soap with essential oils. He first contacted AgrAbility PA in 2008, which initiated a visit from an AgrAbility staff member to provide a farm assessment and recommendations. Todd also received a visit from Dwight Heller, a licensed OT specialist, and representatives from OVR. This team walked with Todd – step by step – through his daily activities on the farm. Dwight was able to make suggestions along the way to improve the function and flow of Todd's workday – from feeding to cleaning and everything in between.

In 2016, Dwight visited again to review Todd's workflow and to offer suggestions on the soap making process. Todd was using an old table to handle and label the soaps prior to distribution, causing him strain and pain. Dwight suggested a Varidesk – an adjustable-height standing desk that allows you to switch between standing and sitting while working. OVR was able to assist with the purchase of a desk.

Todd is grateful for the support to continue farming, thanks to AgrAbility PA and OVR. The time spent with Dwight has truly made a lasting impact on his daily work.

"Dwight has an agricultural background – having grown up on a farm – but he is very good at what he does now. He can come up with ideas to help in the short term, as well as considerations for down the road," Todd said.

For example, using a milking stand. Dwight worked with Todd to adjust the set-up, depending on whether or not he was using a walker to aid in his mobility. Dwight also suggested changes to the feeding process. Todd had to break down 50 lbs. bags into 5-gallon buckets in order to carry them. Similarly, forking manure was a significant strain on his back.

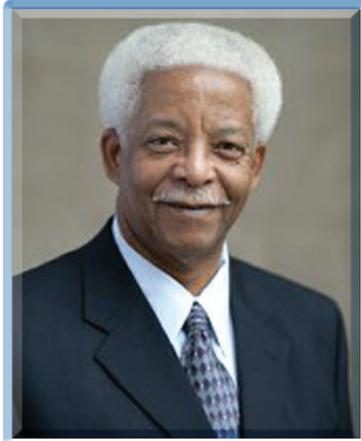
OVR was able to assist with the cost of improving the workflow around Todd's farm. First, with the purchase of a 3-ton bulk feed bin. Feed is blown into the bulk bin monthly and then an auger draws it down for Todd to distribute. Secondly, by concreting the barn floors, Todd can use his tractor to move manure. He also received a composter. These improvements have drastically eased the strain on Todd's body.



*"If anyone is on the fence about contacting AgrAbility PA, I'd tell them to go ahead. It needs to be done to ensure you will be able to do the work you love."
~ Todd Zimmerman*

Todd with the new 3-ton bulk feed bin

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Our Mantra: Do No Harm

AgrAbility PA is so appreciative for all the work that occupational and physical therapists (OT/PT) do for the project and our clients. Over the last 20 years, many therapists were able to assist the project – but our deepest appreciation

goes to Dwight Heller, who has consistently given up his vacation days, weekends, and holidays to serve AgrAbility clients all over the state.

In the formative years of this project, we adopted the mantra: **do no harm**. We non-medical people have all kinds of experiences, talents, and expertise in identifying the assistive technology to accommodate a farmer's disability or condition. Nearly all of our solutions could help the farmer accomplish the chores and tasks required to keep the farm running smoothly and efficiently. Searching the National AgrAbility Project Toolbox online, equipment dealers, manufacturers, and Internet, we identify the best and most reasonably priced items available. AgrAbility PA consistently looks for and recommends new – not used – items because there is no way to predict the long-term durability of used items. Added bonus: new items most often have a warranty attached. During the process of identifying an item or items for a client, we consult with an OT/PT specialist.

Dwight remains one of our OT/PT specialists to this day. He will do a thorough physical evaluation of the farmer. He is particularly concerned with what the farmer is physically capable of doing. He records his findings for our review: from head, neck, and upper extremities to trunk and lower extremities. He compares his findings to “within functional limitations” of a person without a disability. In many instances, Dwight himself will suggest appropriate assistive technology to aid a farmer. All of the data and information he provides is critical for us to use during the formal reporting and recommendation process – so we can continue to **do no harm**.

The OT/PT evaluation is an essential component to the services offered by AgrAbility PA. We have been very successful because of the work that these professionals do.

From all of us and our clients – we thank you!

Dr. Connie Baggett
~ Project Director, AgrAbility PA
~ Associate Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education, Penn State University

10 Tips for Safety & Health This Season

Spring leading into summer is a time of optimism and eagerness on the farm. However, weather and machinery are not always cooperative, making it a frustrating time when you are trying to get everything done.

Here are some tips to help:

- 1. Training** – Take the time to train your workers on all aspects of the farm operation.
- 2. Maintenance** – Annual maintenance of farm equipment is important but daily, pre-operational checks may prevent costly repairs and frustration.
- 3. Guarding** – Check all of your tractors and equipment to make sure that shields and guards are in place. If a shield is damaged, replace it!
- 4. Hats** – Consider replacing your baseball hat with a wide-brimmed hat with flaps or drapes to protect your eyes, ears, and neck from the sun.
- 5. Hydration** – Drink approximately 1 cup of water every 30 minutes to stay hydrated.
- 6. Sunscreen** – Wear sunscreen with a minimum SPF of 15 but a higher rating if you have fair skin. Reapply every 2 hours.
- 7. Breaks** – Take a 15 minute break in a shaded area every 2 hours.
- 8. Nutrition** – Take care of your body by eating meals and packing a snack.
- 9. No Jumping!** – Even if you are in a hurry, you should use three points of contact (e.g., two hands and one foot on the ladder) for getting on and off of a tractor, truck bed, or from a significant height.
- 10. Medication** – Check your prescription and over-the-counter medication(s) to determine if there are any side effects or sensitivities when you are exposed to heat or sunlight.

Make this a safe and healthy year!

Questions & Answers

What to Expect...

On-Farm Occupational Therapy Evaluation

Occupational therapy (OT) is a healthcare profession that focuses on helping people participate in the meaningful activities they need and want to do. Occupational therapists enable people of all ages to live life to the fullest by helping them promote health and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness, or a disability.

AgrAbility PA services include an on-farm occupational therapy evaluation that is FREE to the farmer. Evaluations are completed by a licensed occupational therapist.

Dwight Heller, a licensed OT practitioner, has been working with AgrAbility PA clients since 2001. He took time to answer some of the top questions asked about the OT evaluation process:



Why is an OT evaluation important to my farming future? OT is about optimizing one's ability to be as independent as possible with their

farming daily activities yet at the same time enabling them to cope with their medical disability. The origins of OT include adaptive equipment. Farming is a very difficult job both physically and mentally. OT can educate farmers on ways to incorporate joint and soft tissue conservation, preventing deformity by means of adaptive equipment.

What typically happens during an on-farm OT evaluation? It consists of working with individual farmers as a team member reviewing their medical history, cardio-respiratory skills, orthopedic status, skin integrity, extremity active and passive movement, muscle strength, and problem areas that each one is having due to their medical complexities. We then collaboratively match adaptive equipment to their medical problem, which will enable them to farm with greater ease, efficiency, independence, and safety.

How should I prepare for the evaluation?

Allow a few hours during the day to complete all the comprehensive steps of the evaluation. Portions of the evaluation are completed indoors as well as outdoors. The evaluation will also include observation of actual

or simulated farming activities that the farmer is having difficulties performing.

What is the most common disability or long-term health condition evaluated? Degenerative joint disease or disc disease associated with joint pain and muscle weakness.

Will the occupational therapist understand my farm-specific needs? I have spent close to half my life working on a dairy farm. I can appreciate early mornings and late evening hours working and the 24 hours on the job. I know farming is not always a convenient life but it offers a joyful life through the sense of accomplishment and positive impact to the local communities. I appreciate the benefits of a farming family working together, building a life together. Having the medical background from occupational therapy as well as my former farming experience, I am able to individually customize farming adaptive equipment to each farmer complementing their specific need.

How can I receive an occupational therapy evaluation?

Occupational therapy evaluations are part of the services AgrAbility PA provides, **free of charge**, to their clients. Contact AgrAbility PA to determine if you are eligible to receive an evaluation.

Phone: (814) 867-5288

Email: AgrAbility@psu.edu

Web: www.AgrAbilityPA.org

Dwight Heller was born and raised on a Pennsylvania family-operated dairy farm. He has been in practice for more than 19 years with UPMC/Susquehanna and is a certified hand therapist. He enjoys enabling farmers to resume their passion of farming through the means of adaptive equipment.



Top OT Take-Aways

- 1. Recognize daily farming activities that are repetitive and labor intensive.** Plan your day by pacing your time, simplify the farming task, avoiding extra trips, and repetitive lifting. Take frequent rest breaks.
- 2. Take a step back and look at the farming activity.** Ask yourself: “Is this the most efficient and safe way for me to perform?”
- 3. Do some basic arm and leg stretches as well as trunk rotation exercises** to improve flexibility and prepare joints and soft tissue structures for activity.