

Contact Us

(814) 867-5288
AgrAbility@psu.edu
www.AgrAbilityPA.org

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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

Featured Events:

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS DAY
October 24, 2016
Capitol Rotunda - Harrisburg, PA

PA FARM BUREAU HEALTH & SAFETY FAIR
November 15, 2016
Hershey Lodge - Hershey, PA

KEYSTONE FARM SHOW
January 10-12, 2017
York Fairgrounds - York, PA

PA FARM SHOW/VETERANS & ACTIVE MILITARY DAY
January 12, 2017
PA Farm Show Complex - Harrisburg, PA



Assistive Technology Spotlight

Harvest time is a busy season full of hard work and long hours. Without realizing it, an individual might hitch and unhitch wagons over 100 times in just one day. This repetitive task leads to fatigue and consumes time. It can also be extremely difficult, or almost impossible, for individuals with mobility impairments.

Two farming brothers in Iowa realized this when their father was struggling to hitch their wagons. Out of necessity they created what is now called the Agri-Speed Hitch. Designed to work on tractors, pick-up trucks, and choppers, the hitch bolts to the draw-bar and will fit any brand of wagon.

To hitch to the wagon, line up the V-Guide with the Lift-Rod on the wagon unit, then back the tractor up to the wagon unit and continue backing until the hitch latches. To unhitch, pull the cable release from inside the cab. There is no need to climb out of your vehicle!



Visit www.bergmanmfg.com to watch demonstration videos, view pictures, and learn more about the Agri-Speed Hitch.



DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES

- MARCH 21, 2017 -

NOTE: Entries must be submitted online or mailed directly to: Kendra Martin, Digital Media & Outreach Coordinator, AgrAbility PA, 44 S. 38th Street, Camp Hill, PA 17011

WINNERS ANNOUNCED

AND PRIZES AWARDED

- JUNE 13, 2017 -

CONTEST WINNERS TO BE ANNOUNCED
AT PA STATE FFA CONVENTION

CATEGORIES AND PRIZES
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEMO: \$400
PROMOTIONAL VIDEO: \$400
SERVICE PROJECT: \$400
OVERALL WINNER: \$800

LEARN MORE
CONTACT: KENDRA MARTIN
717-737-3477, EXT 128
KMARTIN@UCPCENTRALPA.ORG
WWW.BRIDGINGHORIZONSPA.ORG

New Contest Opportunity Launches for Students in Pennsylvania FFA

The Bridging Horizons Community Service Contest provides an opportunity for students to use their problem-solving and leadership skills to benefit the community, or directly impact a farmer and/or their farm. The winning entry in each category will be awarded \$400; an additional \$800 will be awarded to an overall grand-prize winner.



The Bridging Horizons contest will accept entries in three categories:

1. Design and create an assistive technology table-top demonstration
2. Develop an AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians promotional video
3. Complete a service project that helps farmers with disabilities and/or their family members

"This event is an excellent opportunity for community-centered, student-driven agricultural education programs to continue to provide their FFA members with challenging, rewarding programs of activities," said Dr. Daniel Foster, Associate Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education at Penn State University, who also serves as the liaison with Pennsylvania agriculture science teachers and the Pennsylvania FFA Association. "The event allows for students and teachers to gain financial reward and provide great ideas to help make their communities better for all to engage in agriculture."

Contest details and criteria for each category are available at the website: www.bridginghorizonspa.org. Entries must be submitted or posted by March 21, 2017 (National Ag Day).

Judging criteria varies among categories, but the core elements of safety, accessibility, and person first language will be looked at and judged in each category. Judges are members of the AgrAbility PA staff and members of the AgrAbility PA Advisory Board who have knowledge related to the subject of agriculture and/or expertise in disability services. Monetary prizes will be presented to the winning entry in each of the three categories, as well as an overall winner. All entries will be recognized at the PA State FFA Convention in June 2017.

FROM THE DIRECTOR



The making of a soldier, airman, sailor, or Marine.

When a person enters the armed forces, they are trained and conditioned for what lies ahead. Everyone goes through a basic training program to be successful for graduation. Officers and drill sergeants have the tremendous job of turning a civilian into a qualified military service

person. Learning discipline is the first order of business. Trainees are taught to stand at attention; many commands like right-face or left-face; and how and when to walk, run, talk, speak, eat, sleep, and salute. Trainees learn camaraderie, teamwork, and military law and punishment—all covered in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Soldiers, airmen, sailors, and Marines are disciplined to follow orders. This sometimes means moving into hostile territory. They follow rules, techniques, and strategies to survive while accomplishing their mission. When their service is complete, they are transferred stateside. This may cause anxiety and stress because most have not had adequate time to process and adjust. This happened to me when I left Vietnam. I reacted to stateside sounds and stimuli as if I were still there.

I mention all of this because the military does an outstanding job of transforming civilians into military service people—dedicated to protecting our freedom and preserving our security. It must be our common goal to ensure they are able to work and live a productive life at home after they return from service. They have made sacrifices beyond what most of us will ever know.

The integration of a Veteran as a productive civilian. There are many organizations and agencies dedicated to helping Veterans adjust to life as a civilian. Such organizations can be found at the federal, state, and local levels, and many are government sponsored and supported. Unfortunately, because Veterans have so many different options to choose from, it can be challenging to effectively serve all of them.

Assisting Veterans who choose a career in the agricultural industry is one that needs to be addressed more intentionally. AgrAbility PA has been helping Veterans for many years. We provide resources and services to men and women who are battling a long-term health condition or disability—sometimes because of that military service—but want to remain working in production agriculture. We partner with the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, PA Assistive Technology Foundation, PA Initiative on Assistive Technology, and others to assist

farmers in acquiring the essential funding needed to make enhancements, changes, or improvements on a farm to accommodate a health issue or disability. Some veterans have returned to a family farm after their service and others found a way to get started in farming. Cathie Dibert and Green“er” Acres Farm (see story on opposite page) is a great example of a military Veteran successfully making the move into agricultural farming.

The average age of a Pennsylvania farmer is their mid-50s—and many served our country in World War II, Korean, and Vietnam-era conflicts. We need to continue to support and enable this generation of farmers. But we must also find a way to assist Veterans returning home from more recent conflicts, such as the Middle East. The chief complaint and request from this new era of Veterans is the need to acquire funds to purchase and equip a farm or ag business.

The big challenge: Addressing the needs, wants, and desires of this new era Veteran. We need to approach this challenge logically and it begins with training—similar to the significant amount of training that goes into a military service person. We must make it a top priority to:

- 1) *Develop an agricultural skill development program for Veterans where they learn about overall farm management—from land and crops to animals and equipment.*
- 2) *Assist Veterans who have accomplished such training obtain funds or start-up capital.*
- 3) *Identify assistive technology and farm modifications for Veterans with a disability or long-term health condition.*

We have a list of current programs and resources to tap into as we approach this task of better serving our Veteran population. I invite you to learn more at: www.AgrAbilityPA.org

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you or someone you know could benefit from our resources and services.

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

Veteran Grows a Farming Career

Cathie Dibert served her country as an E4 specialist in Army military intelligence. Returning to the Claysburg area, she became a registered nurse, and now, a farmer.

Cathie knew she would have to retire from nursing after a heart attack at 35. She needed something that allowed her to have a flexible schedule, good exercise, and plenty of rest. Her husband Rodney Dibert, a building contractor, had acquired the family farm that consisted of 68 acres. But more than 50 of those were mountainous. *“We had five beef cattle, a few run-down outbuildings, and a small amount of ground that might be productive,”* said Cathie. Thus, Green“er” Acres Farm was born. *“I actually grow all of my vegetables on less than an acre of ground,”* she said.

Green“er” Acres produce is sold under the Homegrown by Heroes and Pennsylvania Preferred labeling programs. The Homegrown by Heroes label is open to all farmer veterans. Pennsylvania Preferred denotes the products are grown in Pennsylvania.

To start, Cathie received some assistance from the Farmer Veterans Coalition. The program identifies the needs and furthers the agriculture careers of those who have served their country and are now serving their communities through farming. Cathie has been working to help start a Pennsylvania coalition so other veteran farmers can get future help. It takes 10 people to form such a coalition.

A few years ago, Cathie received a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service grant to install a high tunnel with deep irrigation for her farm. Because plants are protected from the weather, high tunnel tomatoes are protected from blight. The tunnel is the site of a huge array of vegetables including garlic, onions, broccoli, cabbage, Swiss chard, kale, beets, and tomatoes.

Cathie added wall mounts in the tunnel to grow strawberries. She attempted raspberry bushes but found they want to take over the tunnel. Her goal is to have another high tunnel for fruits. *“We are putting almost everything we make back into the business at this time,”* she said.

With her husband in contracting, the couple has learned to recycle many things. Rodney built her a small greenhouse out

of leftover lumber. He also built her a seed starting spot in the basement of their home. For her part, Cathie constructed raised garden beds on some of her hillier property sections to expand her growing space. She struck up a deal with the local Intermunicipal Relations Committee, a recycling organization in nearby Altoona. She gets rich topsoil that plants thrive in. Her four raised beds are about 3 feet by 25 feet located in what would have been an unusable space. Most of the crops are chemical-free. Organic and conventional growing practices are used when appropriate.

Cathie also worked with AgrAbility PA and the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). Their support included a visit from an occupational therapist and a farm assessment of her property to identify modifications and equipment that would facilitate her farming efforts. Because she was eligible to receive their services, OVR provided funding for Cathie to acquire a John Deere Gator so that she could easily access different areas of the farm while reducing physical strain, especially on her heart.

Now into her 13th year of farming and with eight years of Farmers' Markets under her belt, Cathie said she is still constantly learning. She's also always looking for ways to be slightly different. She likes to offer vegetables that come in unusual hues, such as purple tomatoes, or beans, or peppers, explaining that *“The different colors mean they have more antioxidants.”* She also hosts a Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA. She tries to have what the people want and if possible, be the first at the local Farmers' Market with whatever vegetable ripens next. In addition to the vegetables, Cathie offers eggs, chicken, and some

pork. *“Truthfully, I wouldn't be able to do what I do without the help of AgrAbility PA and OVR. “The Gator is indispensable in carrying the totes of produce up and down the hills of the farm in order to get them to market.”*



Above, Cathie in the high tunnel with deep irrigation, which protects her tomatoes and other produce from adverse weather conditions. Below, Cathie shows off her wares at one of the many Farmers' Markets she frequents.



Part of Cathie's story is reprinted with permission from Lancaster Farming, the leading Northeast and Mid-Atlantic farm newspaper, where she was featured in an article.