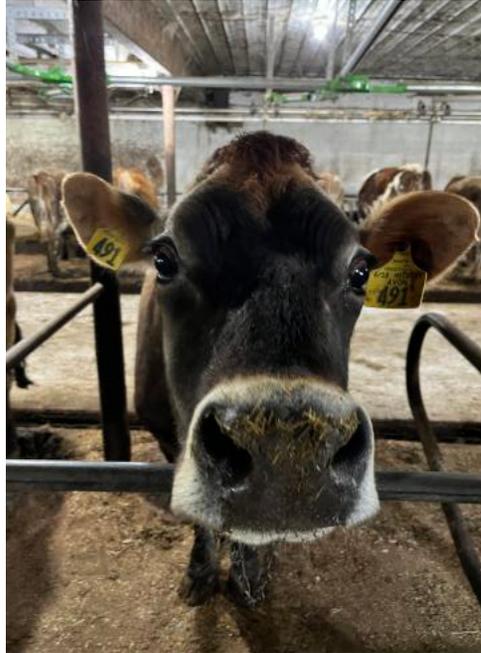


Patience, persistence, and partnership:

A recipe for success for Bradford County grass-fed organic dairy farmers

A generation farm since 1929, Carol and Nate Harkness's Cozy Valley Farm, a grass-fed organic dairy, run by the pair since 1995, covers over 600 acres of land. With that vast amount of land, comes equally vast opportunity, as well as dairy-specific access needs. The demands of any dairy farm frequently include lifting and carrying milkers that can range from 15-25 pounds each, repetitive bending and twisting, multiple trips with a heavy feed cart, and specifically for Carol and Nate, traversing over 600 acres of farmland during growing season. All these daily physical requirements of dairy life can lead to a host of long-standing conditions like chronic pain, arthritis, and bursitis, which the couple are no strangers to. Carol recalled how certain tasks aggravated the diabetic neuropathy in her feet, saying, "I would take buckets and walk around the barn doing 100 animals plus the calves. So that was a lot of steps I was doing twice a day." Nate, having arthritis in his shoulders, hips, and back, added, "We were taking a lot of ibuprofen just to function every day." Having previously worked with AgrAbility in 2005, they knew just who to contact to help make these tasks easier, less painful, and more accessible.

Abbie Kibe, the program assistant and primary staff to complete worksite assessments for AgrAbility PA, completed an updated worksite assessment at Cozy Valley Farm in 2019. Nate stated, "After listening to what Carol's issues were, what



my issues were, one of the first thing she suggested was the track system because she knows that milking with a pipeline over the years, your shoulders take an abuse." Nate summarized the process of the farm assessment, saying, "She comes up and she tours the farm, you know basically around the barn, and talked to us on our procedures on how we do things. And then once she had a good understanding on how our procedures are done, she went ahead and was able to make suggestions in different equipment and different procedures that would help us do what we wanted to do easier." In total, Abbie recommended the following technology and modifications for the couple:

- A rail system for milkers
- A TMR mixer and conveyor system
- UTV
- Automatic wheelbarrow

Modifications made to their routines such as:

- Sitting as needed
- Taking more frequent breaks
- Implementing routine changes to prioritize their health during workflow
- Self-made adjustments and modifications they discovered on their own:
- Adding an additional step to the ladder to get up into the tractor

Nate and Carol's story continued inside

Patience, persistence, and partnership

Carol and Nate's story (cont.)

The farm assessment is only one step in the process to receiving assistive technology and modifications through AgrAbility, and the assessment itself takes about a day to complete, with recommendations for equipment and assistive technology recorded and reported to the farmer(s) and to the funding source of choice (OVR, PATF, or out-of-pocket). The Harkness's primarily went through the Office of Vocational Rehab (OVR) to fund most of their recommended assistive technology and modifications, while paying out of pocket for some of the less expensive items. Nate made a point to emphasize that this process takes time and requires a lot of patience and persistence to reach the end goal of receiving and integrating the assistive technology into the daily functions of the farm. He said, "The other thing that we always caution [farmers] about is, not to be impatient. Because a lot of this stuff takes time. There's a lot of investment in time in this, and it does take a tremendous amount of time, and once you go through it you understand it takes time, like all the steps and procedures." Carol echoed this saying, "[And] every farm is different, and everyone's needs are different, so they have to go in and investigate everything that is needed, you know, trial and error, [like it's very individualized]." Working with OVR requires consistent contact with your caseworker and regular follow ups to ensure you are getting your needs met



which Nate and Carol learned to do quickly, and according to Abbie, have become excellent self-advocates for getting the things they need to help them continue working. And when asked how the recommended modifications and assistive technology has changed their relationship to their work on the farm, both Carol and Nate had nothing but positive remarks. Carol said, "Not having to carry the milkers, and the extra bending, gives you more energy to do other things throughout the day," and added, "I like not dreading having to do certain things. Because I love my calves and my cows, it gives me more time to spend with them. [It] just gives you more time to enjoy things." Nate also noted that the amount of ibuprofen that they had been taking every day, "That's actually decreased. So that was also a positive." And the positive impacts haven't just been for Carol and Nate. They have younger people periodically come and help around the farm, and Nate said, "They're not getting the damage done that we had over the years, that's preventing them from [developing] injuries later on in life." He also emphasized how much of a positive impact Abbie has had through the whole process. "That's what makes Abbie special. She's been around long enough, and she's seen enough stuff that she can make those suggestions that are very beneficial. [We] could be her cheerleader."



Gathering their final thoughts, both Carol and Nate expressed their gratitude for all the help and information AgrAbility has provided them over the years, and Nate made sure to emphasize that this process takes time, saying, "This doesn't happen overnight. It's a process, work the process, have patience—and when you finally get there, it'll be great."

Whether or not you've worked with AgrAbility before, there is always an opportunity to start a long-lasting partnership to get you the assistive technology and modifications you need to make your farm work for you and your access needs. If you or someone you know would benefit from receiving an on-site farm assessment and equipment and modification recommendation plan from AgrAbility PA, you can reach us by email at agrabilitypa@psu.edu or by phone at 814-867-5288.

WORKING WITH OVR: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1

Contact AgrAbility PA by phone (814-867-5288), email (AgrAbilityPA@psu.edu), or website **to start the process.**

2

AgrAbility staff will conduct a **primary interview over the phone** (alternate format if needed). You may be **referred to OVR** for additional services and funding.

3

If referred to OVR, **review the OVR handbook** that will be provided to you in your welcome packet.

4

Contact your local OVR office, request to **fill out an application** for services.

5

Work with your **OVR counselor** to provide the required information, identification, and medical records. **Develop a plan** for services with your OVR counselor.

6

AgrAbility will provide an **on-farm assessment** by the AgrAbility Case Coordinator and an evaluation by an occupational therapist.

7

AgrAbility Case Coordinator will write a **recommendation report** & provide it to your OVR counselor. The counselor will review the report with you. OVR will determine which accommodations can be implemented. **OVR will send out bids & purchase approved items.** Continue working with AgrAbility for any additional assistive technology needs or if more financial assistance is needed.

For more information or to read the full article, please visit:
agrabilitypa.org/resources/educational-articles/



Haze Orner

Staff Updates

Haze Orner has joined the AgrAbility PA staff as part of the Penn State Extension side of our team. He will be focusing on increasing outreach and resources for veterans in agriculture, as well as assisting with on-site farm assessments!

Em Kase has joined the AgrAbility PA team as part of the UCP of Central PA staff. Em is our new social media and marketing lead, working on creating exciting and educational content for our social media platforms and print marketing initiatives. Em also designed this edition of Field Notes!



Em Kase

In addition to new staff, we are also bidding a fond and heartfelt farewell to Abbie Kibe, our Project Assistant, who has been with AgrAbility PA for 10 years, as she moves on to focus on her own farm! Abbie, thank you for all the amazing work you have done and all the genuine connections you have made through AgrAbility. We wish you so much luck on the next step of your career!



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CULTIVATING ACCESSIBLE AGRICULTURE

one farm family at a time

AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians Project is supported under USDA/NIFA Special Projects 2021-41590-34811 in collaboration with Penn State Extension. Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and USDA.

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AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians is a state-wide partnership between Penn State Extension and UCP Central PA.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Rodale Organic Field Day

July 18, 2025

8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

Rodale Institute

611 Siegfriedale Road, Kutztown, PA 19530

Bringing together hundreds of passionate individuals like yourself, who share a deep interest in regenerative organic agriculture.

Penn State's Ag Progress Days

August 12-14, 2025

Tues. the 12th: 9 AM - 5 PM

Wed. the 13th: 9 AM - 7 PM

Thurs. the 14th: 9 AM - 4 PM

Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center

2710 W. Pine Grove Road, Pennsylvania Furnace, PA 16865

Pennsylvania's largest outdoor agricultural exposition, with over 400 exhibitors from the United States and Canada



LEARN MORE:
AgrAbilityPA.org