

Impact

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

From injury to independence

Extension's AgrAbility program helps farmers and ranchers and their families overcome injury, illness and disability so they can do what they love—farm or ranch.

Issue

Farming and ranching are physically demanding and potentially hazardous professions. Every year more than 500,000 agricultural workers in the U.S. suffer job-related injuries. Many accidents can lead to long-term or permanent disability. Aging and illness can also complicate agricultural work. Routine tasks such as driving a tractor or operating machinery can become difficult, if not impossible.

Extension's Response

In 1991, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the National AgrAbility Project (NAP). AgrAbility helps individuals involved in production agriculture—and their families—overcome illness, injury and disability so they can maintain their independence and succeed.

Directed by CSU Extension specialist Robert J. Fetsch, the Colorado AgrAbility Project (CAP) joined the nationwide network in 1998. Colorado State University Extension human development and family studies faculty partner with Goodwill Industries of Denver to provide no-cost services to Colorado farm and ranch families. These partners offer on-site consultations, technical assistance, educational workshops and referrals of local professional service providers.

Individuals and families seeking assistance meet with an AgrAbility occupational therapist and rehabilitation specialist. These professionals make recommendations for modified and adaptive equipment, machinery and tools that can simplify, or make possible, home and work tasks. Modifications can be straightforward or complex:

- Rear mount cameras help drivers see behind them and prevent neck strain
- Lifts help workers with heavy loading and accessing modified vehicles and equipment
- Shock-absorbing tractor seats reduce back pain

These solutions are often paired with others, such as prostheses, steering wheel and hand brake controls, foot pedals, specialized hitches, ladders and electronic sensors.

CSU Extension promotes AgrAbility to individuals and families members with disabilities, and the professionals who work with them, through free, half-day workshops offered each winter across the state. Over the years, workshops have focused on disability or injury issues such as arthritis, social security, back injury education, Multiple Sclerosis, how to prevent secondary injury and accessing work spaces.



The Bottom Line

- Farmers, ranchers and their families overcome physical and emotional obstacles and achieve renewed independence and success through AgrAbility.
- AgrAbility is the only program in Colorado that provides comprehensive rehabilitative services and educational resources to agricultural workers.

By the Numbers

- Estimated number of Colorado farmers and ranchers: 59,000
Those with disabilities: 8,000
- Estimated number of Coloradans living on ranches and farms: 116,000
Those with disabilities, illnesses or conditions: 15,000
- Number of AgrAbility direct assistance clients since 1998: 320
- Number of AgrAbility workshop participants: 505

Impact

The Colorado AgrAbility Project has changed the lives of hundreds of Colorado farmers, ranchers and their family members since the program started in 1998. Overall, 320 Colorado farmers, ranchers and family members have received CAP direct assistance. Thirty-seven CSU Extension agents and other professionals have hosted 108 AgrAbility workshops for more than 230 ranch and farm family members and more than 275 professionals.

In particular, CAP direct assistance has improved the work performance of injured, disabled and aging farmers, ranchers and their family members. Consultations and educational workshops have simultaneously reduced the potential for a secondary injury or illness through awareness and improved working conditions. Most importantly, CAP has helped individuals regain their independence at work, home and in their community. Here are a few highlights:

- Rob Proctor continues to farm after losing all four fingers and thumb on his right hand in a forage harvester cleaning accident. AgrAbility helped him modify his farm equipment with foot pedals and larger buttons and partnered with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to make two custom prostheses that allow Rob to grab and use tools and accomplish other self-sufficient tasks such as buttoning his shirt and writing his name.
- Multiple Sclerosis kept farmer Bert Nesselhuf from supervising his 350-acre farm until AgrAbility and DVR retrofitted an all-terrain vehicle, a Kawasaki Mule, to accommodate his wheelchair.
- Rashell Fritzler was a busy farm wife until a motor vehicle accident left her paralyzed and unable to perform essential tasks. AgrAbility and DVR modified her van and home office. She can now drive her daughter to school and herself to appointments, and work at home.

Immediate and follow-up survey results from CSU Extension AgrAbility workshops confirms CAP's ability to help farmers and ranchers improve their lives through education and resources. Since 1998, 201 farmers and ranchers completed surveys immediately after participating in a 3-hour workshop. CSU Extension sent these individuals follow-up surveys three to 28 weeks following workshop participation. 180 farmers and ranchers completed follow-up surveys which indicate that CAP gives participants hope and enhances the quality of their lives. Responses show the following outcomes:

Immediate	Follow-up	Outcomes
100 percent	93 percent	Reported increased knowledge
99 percent	94 percent	Reported increased satisfaction levels with AgrAbility
100 percent	98 percent	Want their tax dollars to continue supporting AgrAbility
98 percent	-	Plan to use the information
-	89 percent	Reported improved attitude/outlook
-	83 percent	Reported doing something to improve their lives

“AgrAbility provided people to talk to when I was depressed, and reminded me that there are people worse off than me. Colorado AgrAbility does an awful lot of good by just listening to people talk.”

– Gail Claussen
Rancher, Yoder, Colorado

“The engineering ideas were really spectacular. They have unique designs you would never think of.”

– Don Lumbarly
Farmer, Whitewater, Colorado

Learn More

The Colorado AgrAbility Project serves all Colorado ranching and farming families. Individuals do not need to attend a workshop to receive assistance. Program details, success stories and winter workshop schedules are listed on the Colorado AgrAbility website: www.agrability.caahs.colostate.edu.

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