

AgrAbility helps keep farm family member involved

By Jennifer Hobby & Matt Hargreaves

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but no picture can capture the radiance of one smile from young Kevin Mouritsen of Young Ward, Utah. Kevin, 18, was born with congenital birth defects so rare that the condition doesn't have a name. Kevin's parents, Allen and Becky Mouritsen, simply call it "Kevin's Syndrome."

Like a lot of farm families, the Mouritsens demonstrate an almost visible bond and connection with one another, a strong faith in spite of their hurdles and a commitment to stay strong and independent. They radiate a clear pride in "our farm, our family and our Kevin." This can be seen and felt as one interacts with the family, including two other children: Sandra, 14, and Adam, 3. Another son, Scott, was born with the same condition Kevin has and succumbed suddenly to a case of strep throat that damaged his heart when he was just 3 years old.

Kevin's condition has affected his growth, lowered his vision and hearing, stunted his speech and limited his cognition. In spite of this, he greets visitors with an enormous, welcoming smile and excitedly invites them to watch a favorite movie. He also wants to be a contributing part of the family farm.

AgrAbility first met the Mouritsens in 2008. The family became aware of the program during an outreach activity at a transition fair for school-aged children with disabilities and their families. Their request was a small but meaningful one: They asked for help to modify the family's tractor so that Kevin could ride safely with his father.

When the family bought the tractor, the implement dealer knew of Kevin's desire to be a part of the farm and installed a small, bench buddy seat. However, it was still difficult to hoist Kevin into the cab.

"He may be small, but he's strong," Becky Mouritsen said.

"He's heavier than he looks."

After working with the family and discussing options, it was recommended that an additional step be added to the tractor. Utah State University's Assistive Technology (AT) lab and AgrAbility also provided a seat back designed for a wheelchair, some belting for the seat belt and other materials to upgrade the buddy seat. In total the AT lab's contributions totaled nearly \$300 worth of materials, but the value to the Mouritsens was much greater.

Kevin Mouritsen prepares to help his dad, Allen, with the farm work, something that's easier and safer for him to do now thanks to an extra step and other improvements made to the family's tractor. AgrAbility of Utah made the additional step and worked with Utah State University to make Kevin's tractor seat safe and comfortable.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UTAH FARM BUREAU



Even a small AgrAbility project can have a big impact for a farm family like the Mouritsens: Allen, Becky, Sandra, Kevin and Scott (clockwise). Becky Mouritsen said the AgrAbility program is great and more people should know about it.

"This is a case where cost is not the issue," said Stan Clelland at Utah State's AT lab. "What's important is that Kevin can spend the time with his dad, and be more independent."

The additions made by the lab also brought peace of mind for Kevin's parents.

"I'm glad that he's a lot safer while riding in the tractor now," said Allen Mouritsen.

AgrAbility also manufactured the additional step for the project. Steps are a simple modification that the AgrAbility program frequently uses.

"A \$25 step can do wonders to save a guy's back, hips and knees," said Luke Petersen, AgrAbility program manager in Utah. "Often the first step on a tractor is nearly two feet high."

USDA administers the national AgrAbility project and funds state AgrAbility projects in 27 states.

Beyond helping with assistive technology, AgrAbility links farm families with other programs that can help alleviate some of the expense that comes with having a disability, serious injury or other health problem.

For Kevin and his family, a custom buddy seat added a visible and tangible means to increase his quality of life. AgrAbility professionals will continue to work with the family to assist them in navigating and accessing additional resources that can help ease some of their financial burdens and ensure that Kevin can be as self-supportive as possible. AgrAbility sees small successes like Kevin's as important to the future success of the farm.

"This has been a great program

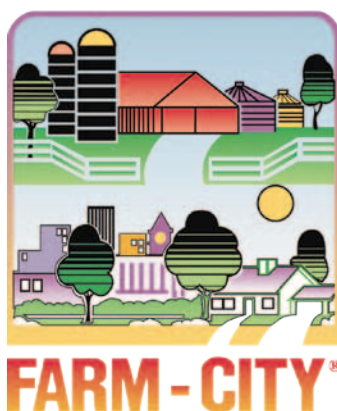
to work with; we wish more people knew about it," said Becky Mouritsen.

If you or someone you know could benefit from the services of AgrAbility, contact your state AgrAbility program office. For a list of state programs and to learn more about the national program, visit www.agrabilityproject.org.

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National Farm-City Week Nov. 20-26

The National Farm-City Council will kick off National Farm-City Week, Nov. 20-26, by hosting a symposium on Nov. 19 titled "Farm Animal Care: Myths v. Facts." The symposium will take place from 10:30 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the Westin Indianapolis Hotel in downtown Indianapolis, Ind. It will feature a keynote address by Indiana Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman and a panel discussion about how to communicate to urban audiences about food animal production. The symposium will be broadcast live on the national radio show *AgriTalk*, whose host, Mike Adams, will moderate the discussion. The farm animal care theme will carry forward throughout the week with grassroots Farm-City events around the country. For more information about Farm-City Week, visit www.farmcity.org. The cost to attend the symposium and luncheon is \$50 per person. To register, contact Kim Baker at kimb@fb.org.

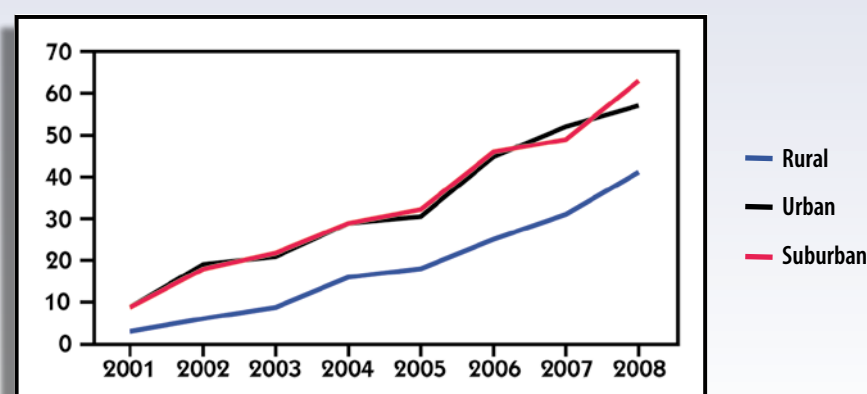


Corner Post

Trends in Home Broadband Adoption

(By Region)

Percent of households



Source: USDA, ERS