

## Peer Connections

Spring 2010

### *Promoting Success in Agriculture for People with Disabilities and Their Families*

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention reports that arthritis is the leading source of disability in the U.S. Arthritis affects approximately one-third of all adult farm and ranch operators and is considered one of the leading causes of disability by customers of the USDA AgrAbility Project. Arthritis can cause significant impairments to one's mobility, dexterity, capacity to lift heavy loads and emotional well-being due to unmanaged pain and other factors.

Arthritis is especially detrimental to farmers, ranchers, farm workers and their



families and caretakers because of the nature of their work. Climbing grain bins, mounting and dismounting tractors or horses, baling hay, feeding livestock, harvesting vegetables, milking cows, and using heavy tools and machinery all require strength and mobility, which are lessened by the affects of arthritis.

Trauma to joints often occurs in agricultural settings. Such trauma may include the impact on joints when jumping off of tractors or combines, being kicked by large livestock, locking knees when riding in vibrating machinery, or the stress from constant bending when milking cows. This trauma increases the joint stress and pain felt by many agricultural workers.

Since there is no known cure for arthritis, education and awareness of pain management techniques are considered the best practices for treating the disease. This includes, but is not limited to, joint protection, work simplification and stress reduction. Encouraging individual weight loss, promoting behaviors that reduce

shock to joints, and modifying worksites to eliminate high-risk tasks are significant to preventing joint damage. Thus, it's extremely important that agricultural professionals be kept abreast of the latest education and research based information on arthritis management to ensure their health and well-being.

With the average age of the American farmer climbing above 57, increasingly more farmers will find tasks difficult to complete. Many agricultural workers do not know they may be at risk of developing arthritis.

Tasks such as lifting heavy objects, operating machinery, and working with livestock will become harder to complete as arthritis affects agricultural workers. However, removing these tasks from everyday life may not be an option for a farmer or rancher. A few solutions can be implemented to help control joint stress and pain in farming situations.



- Wear quality, non-slip footwear
- Use appropriate assistive aids
- Use proper posture when sitting for long periods of time in tractors
- Use the largest joint possible to complete a task
- Avoid gripping and grasping for long periods of time
- Simplify jobs and tasks, and pace yourself throughout the work load

A farmer, rancher, or farm worker may continue to live a productive life in agriculture if they are willing to commit to controlling their arthritis by diet, exercise, modifying their work, and respecting the physical limitations of their bodies. Info from [www.arthritis-ag.org](http://www.arthritis-ag.org)

## Gates That Work While You Stay Put

If you are a farmer or rancher with a mobility impairment, you know what a pain it is (and how painful it can be) to deal with opening and closing pasture or barn area gates. This seemingly simple task can require you to get in and out of your pickup or tractor, or climb on and off your ATV many times a day. Here are two products that can help alleviate that problem.



### Drive-Thru Electric Gate

Keeps in cattle, hogs, sheep and horses like an electric fence. Protects the finish of farm vehicles since the metal never touches the vehicle. The gate is energized with any common electric, battery or solar fencer, or electric fence. Fiberglass polyethylene arms support the hanging electrical yellow-coated streamers that release a harmless shock when touched. Simple to install and easy to use. Insulators are already on the gate. 4 nails install each side. 13-19ft gate= \$169.99/18-24ft gate= \$ 209. [www.NorthernTool.com](http://www.NorthernTool.com) 1-800-221-0516



The **GAP ZAPPER** is a heavy, flexible, mat made of two layers of rubber. A special compound in the top layer makes the **GAP ZAPPER** conductive and delivers the same shock as an electric fence. When any animal steps on, smells, or touches the **GAP ZAPPER**, an electric shock turns the animal away. Rubber-tired vehicles and equipment can cross with no harm to the **GAP ZAPPER**. You can walk across the **GAP ZAPPER** if you have on rubber- or vinyl-soled shoes.

Go to [www.thegapzapper.com](http://www.thegapzapper.com) for more info or call 573-756-2050



## Vermont Arthritis & Agriculture Workshop

Presented by Amber Wolfe, AgrAbility Project Coordinator  
of the Arthritis Foundation, Heartland Region, Indianapolis, IN

Two **free** workshops to be held:

### **Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>**

Contois Auditorium at City Hall

149 Church Street, Burlington, VT

9:00am – 12:00pm program for Farmers & Public

1:00pm – 3:00pm program for Agriculture Professionals

### **Thursday, April 15<sup>th</sup>**

American Legion

637 Route 103 South, Chester, VT

9:00am – 12:00pm program for Farmers & Public

1:00pm – 3:00pm program for Agriculture Professionals

Light refreshments will be served

For more information about these **free** workshops and to register contact

Tom Younkman, VCIL AgrAbility Specialist at [tyounkman@vcil.org](mailto:tyounkman@vcil.org) or call 1-800-639-1522

