

# Nebraska FARMER



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# AgrAbility advantage



By DON McCABE

**J**USTIN Liss never expected to be a tree cutter. His passion was feeding cattle and farming, and in his few off hours, team roping.

Sometimes fate deals the unexpected. For the 54-year-old Liss, the unexpected was a heart attack on July 2, 2003. Any chance of a normal recovery was dashed when, after surgery, he suffered two strokes caused by reaction to a blood thinner. He spent two weeks in the hospital and six more in a Lincoln rehabilitation center.

"It took me nearly three years to get functional again," he says.

The long and difficult recovery continues today. But Liss is back on the farm east of Silver Creek, and with the help of his wife, Laurie, and good friend, Glenn Lemburg, he has rearranged his career and outlook.

He and Lemburg are now partners in Cutting Edge Tree Service, a business they formed two years ago to clear invasive trees and brush from pastures and along rivers.

### Aid from AgrAbility

Justin and Laurie Liss say they could not have accomplished the necessary transi-

**BRIGHTER OUTLOOK:** Justin Liss stays on the farm with help from Nebraska AgrAbility.

### At a glance

- Program assists rural people who have disabilities.
- It's a partnership between UNL Extension and Easter Seals.
- A Silver Creek farmer received help from the program.

tion, and still stayed on their farm, without the assistance of Nebraska AgrAbility. AgrAbility is a partnership between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension and Easter Seals Nebraska. It started in 1995 as a program to assist farmers and ranchers with disabilities caused by injury or illness.

AgrAbility's objective is to return clients to the farm or ranch so they can continue working in agriculture, says Victoria Lipovsky, AgrAbility project leader with Easter Seals Nebraska.

"We work with other professionals, including vocational rehabilitation specialists, to modify farm operations, adapt equipment, increase farmstead accessibility, provide financial counseling, find funding sources and coordinate community services," says Lipovsky, who is based in Hastings.

Since 1995, Nebraska AgrAbility has helped more than 400 farmer and rancher clients.

For more information on the program and the Liss family, go to Page 4.

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## NewsWatch

# Adapting through AgrAbility

By DON McCABE

**A** HEART attack and two ensuing strokes in July 2003 left Justin Liss paralyzed on his right side and at a total loss as to what might happen to his farm and way of life.

Then, while Justin was still in a rehabilitation center in Lincoln, his neighbors told him and his wife, Laurie, about Nebraska AgrAbility, a partnership between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension and Easter Seals Nebraska that has assisted some 400 Nebraska farm and ranch families in the past 15 years.

Here's how the USDA-funded program helped the Liss family.

After Laurie Liss made the first contact, one of AgrAbility's rural rehabilitation assistants visited them, learned of their desire to stay on the farm, and determined what tasks Justin could do and the challenges he faced in accomplishing those tasks. As part of its mission, AgrAbility got them in touch with a specialist at Vocational Rehabilitation. Together, they

## At a glance

- Nebraska AgrAbility helped a farmer switch his career focus.
- Vocational rehab specialists assist him with planning.
- AgrAbility has helped him start a tree-cutting business.

provided Justin with several tools and equipment modifications so he could continue with his cow-calf herd. Vocational Rehabilitation, which is part of the Nebraska Department of Education, is the funding partner for eligible AgrAbility clients.

"They recommended a calving chute and working pens to help me with calving," Justin says. "We also obtained a four-wheeler to get around, air tools, an air compressor and a safety step to get into the tractor."

Those adaptations worked, even though he had lost a lot of strength since the heart attack. But without the crops or feedlot, the cow herd was unable to provide sufficient income for the family.

At that point, Vocational



**BRANCHING OUT:** AgrAbility helped Justin Liss (right) start a tree-cutting business. His business partner is Glenn Lemburg, a neighbor.

Rehabilitation helped Justin develop a plan to start his tree-cutting business, a venture in which he partners with Glenn Lemburg, a friend from Osceola. They remove trees and invasive species from pastures and along rivers.

After Justin's heart attack and strokes, the Liss family relied heavily on Lemburg, whose son, Bryan, is married to Amanda Liss, Justin and Laurie's daughter. "Glenn basically took control on his own that summer of 2006 and did our harvesting. He's always been here for us," Justin says.

At the time of their dad's heart attack, the Lisses' daugh-

ters, Amanda and Amber, were 23 and 21, respectively. "Amber took over management of the cow herd, and Amanda helped Glenn with irrigating," Laurie says. "They were a huge help."

## A family business

Cutting Edge Tree Service is a family affair, with Laurie doing much of the calling and scheduling and Brenda Lemburg, Glenn's wife, handling the books.

In 2009, their company was one of a half-dozen tree cutters contracted to remove vegetation, including Russian olive trees, along the North Platte River Valley in the Panhandle.

The business requires a skid-steer loader with a front-mounted saw and grapple fork attachments. "Vocational Rehabilitation provided us startup grants to purchase the skid-steer loader and to install some special items I needed in the cab," Justin says. "Then we received a low-interest loan for the remainder."

While Vocational Rehabilitation is the primary funding source for AgrAbility clients, AgrAbility also can refer clients to other programs, including Social Security.

For more information, go on the Web at [agrability.unl.edu](http://agrability.unl.edu) or call 800-471-6425.

## Funded for 4 more years

**N**EBRASKA AgrAbility will continue assisting farmers and ranchers with disabilities at least for another four years, thanks to a grant recently approved by USDA.

The grant, \$180,000 a year for each of the four years, will run through May 14, 2014, says Sharry Nielsen, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension educator in Kearney County and co-director of Nebraska AgrAbility.

"The grant will continue to fund operating expenses and staff," Nielsen says.

Bill Booker, Extension educator in Box Butte County, is the other Nebraska AgrAbility co-director.

## What AgrAbility does to help

**A**GRABILITY also develops peer support networks and trains occupational and physical therapists to understand agricultural clients' needs," says Victoria Lipovsky, Nebraska AgrAbility project leader.

The program, which does not charge for its services, works with community professionals to:

- modify farm and ranch operations
- adapt equipment
- increase farmstead accessibility
- provide financial counseling
- identify funding sources
- coordinate community services

## Coming Events

### May

**20-21:** UNL Food Processing Center's second annual National Small Food Manufacturing Conference, Embassy Suites Old Market, Omaha. Call 402-472-2819 or go to [www.fpc.unl.edu/nsfmc](http://www.fpc.unl.edu/nsfmc).

**27:** Sandhills Cattle Association annual convention, fairgrounds, Broken Bow. Call

800-658-0551 or go to [www.sandhillscattle.com](http://www.sandhillscattle.com).

### June

**3-4:** Nebraska Cattlemen Midyear Meeting, Quality Inn & Suites/Sandhills Convention Center, North Platte. Call 402-475-2333 in Lincoln or 308-762-3005 in Alliance.

**4-5:** Cattlemen's Ball of

Nebraska, Norris and Lori Marshall acreage south of Kearney. Go to [www.cattlemensball.com](http://www.cattlemensball.com).

**9-10:** Ranch & Home Expo, Viaero Event Center, Kearney. Call 402-244-5471.

**16-17:** Sandhills Ranch Expo, Bassett. Call 402-684-2320.