

A Farmer Again

By Rebecca Brightwell and Cathy Walters

Richard Stanley has lived on his family's farm his entire life. His tanned skin and calloused hands provide evidence that he's worked these fields since he was old enough to hold a tool. He feels a deep connection to this land that spans three generations. "My grandfather bought this farm; it was probably 150 years ago. It's been in the Stanley family that long," he said. Toccoa Valley Farm is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains near the southern tip of the Appalachian Trail.

It's this connection to the land that left Mr. Stanley emotionally devastated when over the course of just three days in 2005 he went from being an active and independent farmer to lying immobile in his bed. The life that Mr. Stanley, and his wife Ann, had known for over four decades had changed in an instant.

Doctors diagnosed Mr. Stanley with Guillain Barré syndrome. It is a rare disorder that causes the immune system to attack the peripheral nervous system (PNS). The PNS nerves connect the brain and spinal cord with the rest of the body. Damage to these nerves

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—Richard Stanley

makes it hard for them to transmit signals. As a result, muscles have trouble responding to the brain. No one knows what causes the syndrome.

After 29 days in a hospital bed, Mr. Stanley left in a wheelchair, plagued with uncertainties for the future of his farm and his life. "It just had me all torn up. I thought I was going to have to sell all my cattle and farm equipment. I didn't know what I was going to do," he said.

Mr. Stanley, who had just days ago been under the sun tending his farm, could now only sit idly by watching as his brother

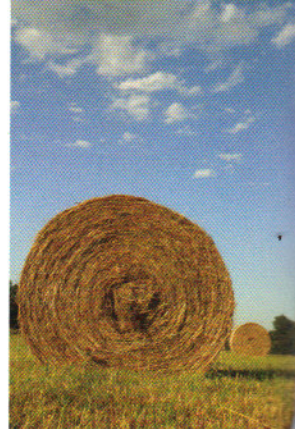
stepped in to feed his cattle and cut and bail his hay. Determined to resume farming, Mr. Stanley began going to physical therapy sessions three times a week, making great strides in his physical ability. Despite these efforts, Mr. Stanley remained stuck on the sidelines of his own family's farm. And then Mr. Stanley learned about an organization that could enable him to do something he never thought possible—sit in his tractor once more. AgrAbility is a free service through the U.S. Department of Agriculture that focuses on promoting independence for members of the agricultural community who have disabilities. The program is managed by the University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension Service in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the Institute on Human Development and Disability in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

"Our goal is to return farmers back to what they love to do as quickly and safely as possible after an injury or acquiring a chronic health condition," said Rebecca Brightwell, Project Manager for the AgrAbility program. "It is difficult for farmers, who are self-reliant and used to hard work, not be able to take care of their farm as they once did. We want for them to know there is hope and we can help them to be productive again."

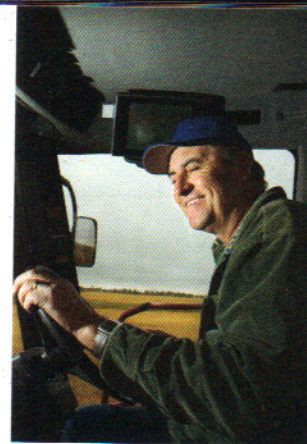
AgrAbility was authorized in the 1990 farm bill and has been reauthorized in every farm bill since then. There are currently 31 states that are part of the AgrAbility program. The program in Georgia began in 2005. Since that time about 350 Georgia farm families have received assistance. In addition, over 400 professionals, including occupational and physical therapists,

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Left: On his tractor, as he feels the vibrations of the clutch in his hands and hears the hum of the machinery ringing in his ears, Richard Stanley is a farmer again thanks to AgrAbility and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation.



AgrAbility Facts Sheet



What is AgrAbility?

It is a United States Department of Agriculture national grant program that aids farmers and ranchers with chronic health conditions or disabilities to remain employed in production agriculture. Production agriculture refers to raising or growing an agricultural commodity.

AgrAbility was first introduced nationally as part of the 1990 Farm Bill. It has been funded in the State of Georgia since 2005.

What can AgrAbility do for a farmer/rancher (the customer) with a disability?

Assistance may include identifying assistive technology solutions to make tasks easier; a business plan to help stabilize and grow your business; community or student volunteer projects; and a wide variety of other resources.

How many farmers/ranchers with disabilities are there?

According to the department of labor regarding the number of individuals engaged in production agriculture and the 2,000 census report on the percent of individuals

who experience a disability, approximately 288,000 individuals engaged in production agriculture experience physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities that affect performing one or more essential work tasks.

In Georgia, it is estimated that 25,000 to 35,000 individuals living in agricultural households have a disability.

Who is eligible for AgrAbility services?

Farmers, ranchers, farm workers, or family members employed in production agriculture are eligible for AgrAbility services and may have any type of disability. Examples include:

- Amputations
- Back pain
- Cancer
- Cerebral palsy
- Diabetes
- Multiple sclerosis
- Post-polio syndrome
- Spinal cord injury
- Traumatic brain injuries
- Arthritis
- Blindness or vision impairments
- Cardiac problems
- Deafness or hearing impairments
- Cognitive Disabilities
- Muscular dystrophy
- Respiratory problems
- Stroke

Does someone qualify for AgrAbility benefits if they were injured in a non-farm related incident?

Yes.

Does someone have to own the farm or ranch to get services?

No, they can be an employee of a farm or ranch.

How can someone contact AgrAbility for help?

If someone is interested in AgrAbility Project services (e.g., training, site visit, on-farm assessments, technical assistance, and other information working directly with the farmer or rancher), they should contact us at 706-542-0304 or call toll free at 1-877-524-6264. More information is at our website www.farmagain.com.

Where can I read about farmers and ranchers that have benefited from AgrAbility services?

Go to farmagain.com and agrability.com for stories of farmers and ranchers.

What if someone wants to get into a different type of farming, or less labor-intensive farming, can AgrAbility help?

Yes. The AgrAbility Service Coordinator will discuss the current operation, assess where changes may need to be made, consult with agricultural specialists if needed and then develop a plan for switching into a different type of farming. Sometimes with laborsaving technology or restructuring how work is done, someone may be able to remain in his or her current operation.

What if someone does not live in Georgia. Does their state or region have an AgrAbility program?

For a complete listing of the State AgrAbility Projects and state staff, please go to www.agrability.org. If their state does not have an AgrAbility Project, or if they have general questions about AgrAbility, please contact the National Project staff through Purdue at 1-800-825-4264. The national staff can provide direct technical consultation to consumers, health and rehabilitation professionals and other service providers on how to accom-



Georgia's Project Name:
AgrAbility in Georgia

Georgia's Website:
Farmagain.com

National Websites:
Agrability.com / Agrability.org

Georgia Contact Numbers:
1-706-542-0304 / 1-877-524-6264

Georgia Contact E-Mail:
info@agrabilityinga.com

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have received training on how to serve the agricultural community better.

AgrAbility helped to obtain funding through the state's Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR) to fit Mr. Stanley's tractor with a mechanical lift for his tractor. Using this device, Mr. Stanley can transfer from his wheelchair to his tractor seat with relative ease. Special modifications to the clutch and brakes have made it possible for Mr. Stanley to operate his tractor with his hands.

Mr. Stanley was amazed to find himself back in his tractor seat after six years. "I

haven't been able to get up in the tractor seat until about a month ago, until I got the lift. And then it was the greatest feeling I ever had," he said.

His wife Ann, who has supported Mr. Stanley throughout his ordeal, also recognized the incredible achievement her husband has made by sitting in his tractor. "Getting him back on the tractor is the best thing that could ever happen to him," she said.

With the help of AgrAbility and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation, Mr. Stanley now has the means to bail his hay and feed his

cattle. No longer required to merely observe, he is once more the active leader of his farm. On his tractor, as he feels the vibrations of the clutch in his hands and hears the hum of the machinery ringing in his ears, Richard Stanley is a farmer again.

For more information on AgrAbility call 1-877-542-6264 or e-mail info@agrabilityga.com. Visit their website at www.farmagain.com. ■

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moderate disabilities in production agriculture. For example, staff can assist fabricators with designing hand controls for a tractor. In addition, national staff can provide members of other national and international agricultural and health-related organizations with information and resources to help farmers and ranchers with disabilities.

Who provides the funding for AgrAbility?

Support for AgrAbility comes from the federal government through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Are there any fees or costs associated with AgrAbility's services?

There are no fees for the services received through AgrAbility. If there are accommodations or technology needed that may make someone's work easier, the costs will be their responsibility. If they have difficulty with these costs, the AgrAbility specialist will help look for financial assistance. However, there are many solutions that may not have any cost associated with them.

Does AgrAbility have money to help purchase assistive technology for customers?

No, the AgrAbility Project cannot purchase assistive technology for customers. In special circumstances, devices are fabricated at AgrAbility's in Georgia's workshop at the Tifton campus. In this instance, the customer buys the materials and the AgrAbility staff time is free.

Does AgrAbility fund modifications on farms/ranches?

AgrAbility staff performs work site assessments and develop a plan to accommodate the farmer/rancher. Funding for the plan generally come from the State Vocational Rehabilitation program, grants or by the farmer/rancher.

Where can someone find funding to buy equipment they need to keep farming?

Funding is always a difficult issue. If they have a disability and are eligible, the State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program may be able to help them.

Are there waiting lists for getting help through AgrAbility or funding sources such as Vocational Rehabilitation?

Waiting lists with the AgrAbility Project are rare. If a list exists, individuals should apply so they can receive services when they are available. Programs like the state vocational rehabilitation agencies (VR) are more likely to have waiting lists due to federal and state budget constraints. Services are being provided to those with the most significant disability and how it affects daily functioning. It is recommended that you submit the written application to VR. The process of determining eligibility and ranking for services, done in an interview format, often reveals barriers and functional limitations not previously considered. ■