

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA

Assisting Farmers and Farm Workers to Continue Working Safely and Productively

E-NEWS – ISSUE NO. 1: 2016

- **Featured Clients:** Mojdeh Karimi & Robert Cunningham; Alvin Blaha
- **News:** Murphy Deming Practicum; National AgrAbility Training; USDA Microloan Program
- **Updates:** AgrAbility Virginia Advisory Group; Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition
- **Introducing:** Crystal Kyle, AgrAbility Virginia; New Website and Facebook Page

FEATURED CLIENTS

Robert and Mojdeh

Mojdeh and Robert reside on a twenty-seven acre farm in Chesterfield County. Twenty-two acres of the farm is in hardwood trees. The pine trees were harvested several years ago and replaced with hardwood trees to aid cross pollination of crops by their honeybees. The remaining five acres is planted in Asian and Middle Eastern vegetables as well as Heirloom tomatoes, shitake mushrooms, cucumbers, turnips, beets, kale, collards, herbs such as basil, watermelons, cantaloupes, heirloom apples trees, blackberries (Arapaho, Cherokee), figs, and several honeybee hives. Mojdeh is challenged by sciatic



nerve problems in her lower back and degenerative disc disease, as well as significant arthritis in her knees and she is also diabetic. Robert suffers from Ilioinguinal Nerve Entrapment, which originates from the lower back, causing severe pain inside his leg. This entrapment was due to a non-farm work related activity that forced him into an awkward and traumatized position, thereby damaging the nerve. Robert also has some arthritis in his left knee. For both Mojdeh and Robert, standing and sitting for long periods of time, squatting, lifting, and walking long distances are often very challenging. The nature of their commercial produce garden demands all of these activities. AgrAbility Virginia's Service Coordinator, Joe Young, was able to assist them in becoming more productive. They lacked a gardening irrigation system to consistently have water available throughout the growing season. Joe requested help from the Virginia State University Small Farm Outreach program which resulted in their receiving a grant for a drip irrigation system that was installed by Virginia State. This solved their water problem and increased crop production for the year. Additionally, Joe connected them with NRCS (Natural Resources and Conservation Services) to apply for a High Tunnel Grant that will

enhance their production by providing better quality products in addition to extending the growing season. They submitted an application for the High Tunnel and are awaiting a decision from NRCS, which they should be receiving in January 2016. Both Mojdeh and Robert purchased Rolling Cart Seats, which they saw on display by AgrAbility at the Virginia State Small Farm Outreach Farm Day, to use while working their crops. They are also considering purchasing some Adaptive Hand Tools that will reduce the stress on their backs and knees. To learn more about Ilioinguinal Nerve Entrapment, visit: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilioinguinal_nerve

Nina Blaha, David Law (DARS), Alvin Blaha (L:R)



In 2015, Alvin was diagnosed with Myelodysplastic Syndrome (ineffective production, or dysplasia, of all blood cells) which required Alvin to be in and out of the hospital taking treatments. Alvin had planted cotton in the spring and bought an International 2555 cotton picker, to use for the fall harvest. Unfortunately, because of diminished strength, Alvin could not safely get up into the picker; he needed a lift to put him on the upper platform of the cotton picker so he could operate the equipment. Alvin had worked with AgrAbility and the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), in the past, to address issues with

mounting his combine. Alvin contacted AgrAbility Service Coordinator, Joe Young, who reconnected Alvin with DARS through Rehab counselor, Dolores Heisler. Dolores re-opened Alvin's file and contacted Dave Law, a DARS Rehab Engineer, to design a system that would enable Alvin to safely mount his cotton picker. Dave sent DARS engineer Tom Rybak and OT John Allen out to Alvin's place to assess the situation. Tom and John took precise measurement, gathered other data needed and made that information available to Dave. Dave then proceeded to design, construct, and implement a custom lift for Alvin that allowed him to access the operating platform of the picker. This new lift provided Alvin easy access to operate his picker in time for the harvest. But the lift had an unexpected benefit as well. During the initial stages of harvesting, the cotton in the picker bin caught fire, and Alvin had to descend from the picker. The lift allowed Alvin to escape without injury! The lift was not damaged in the fire so Alvin bought another International 2555 Cotton Picker and transferred the lift to the replacement picker which enabled him to successfully complete his cotton harvesting. Everyone is grateful that Alvin had multiple beneficial outcomes from the AgrAbility / DARS assistance! To learn more about Myelodysplastic Syndrome, visit: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myelodysplastic_syndrome

USDA EXPANDS MICROLOANS: PURCHASE FARMLAND & IMPROVE PROPERTY

The USDA just announced that they are expanding microloans to help farmers purchase farmland and improve property. If you are interested in finding out more:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/microloans/index>

MURPHY DEMING COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES PRACTICUM

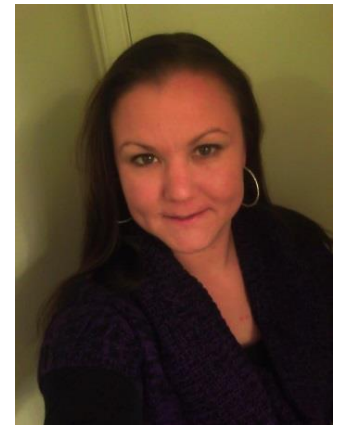


L-R: Kirk Ballin, AgrAbility Program Coordinator; Taylor Delp; Kelly Weaver; Jose Gil-Figueroa

The Mary Baldwin Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences is located in Fishersville, VA, not far from the Augusta Medical Center. The College was established in 2014 to offer Doctors of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy, Master of Science in Physician Assistant, and Registered Nurse to Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing. In the second year of the 3-year Doctor Programs, students are required to do a semester practicum with a professional agency that in some way is associated with physical or occupational therapy. AgrAbility had the honor of participating in this inaugural semester for the practicum studies. The three students (above) did: 1. an AgrAbility site visit with an AgrAbility client; 2. compiled a very extensive data base of agriculturally related agencies, healthcare facilities, and educational programs, for marketing contacts; 3. designed an information packet to be selectively distributed to the contacts. This was quite an accomplishment for one semester! The AgrAbility Team felt it was time well spent, and we are developing another practicum with a new team of students, this coming semester. To learn more about The Mary Baldwin Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences, visit: www.mbc.edu/health_sciences/about/

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA WELCOMES A NEW TEAM MEMBER

This past fall, AgrAbility Virginia was able to welcome a new team member, Crystal Kyle, who is a graduate student at Virginia Tech. Crystal was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has three beautiful daughters. Crystal is a first generation college graduate that holds a BS in Earth and Environmental Science along with two minors in Waste Management and OSHA. She graduated in 2014 with a Masters in Agriculture Education. In order to pay for this education, she first joined the Military. During her first tour in Afghanistan, Crystal was assigned many jobs including: working on the electronics on CH-47 helicopters, disaster and recover of aircraft, and multiple kinds of guard duty. One of these duties involved tower watch. Daily, she would watch the local farmer's plant, irrigate, manage and harvest their crops from the tower. Most of the work was done without modern machinery or assistance. She became intrigued with their methods and began to think



about the environmental aspects of farming. After Crystal's last tour in Iraq she was honorably discharged. Initially, Crystal settle on a certificate in Medical Coding, but faith had other plans. A professor from the community college invited her to work on a Micro-Biology project and lead to him recommending that she pursue an Associate's Degree in Biology. After following his advice, Crystal was accepted and earned an undergraduate degree. It was during her undergraduate studies that she was introduced to agriculture and began to work under an assistantship in environmental science, soil science and row crop production. Just before her Undergraduate graduation, she attained a position under the Animal Science expert in NCAT's Cooperative Extension, studying meat goats and Angus Cattle. Her time spent on the farm was the most cherished and she began to feel a reconnection to life. She questioned how she could advocate this form of rehabilitation and civilian reintroduction to other veterans, when a beloved friend and professor advised Crystal to apply and earn a Ph.D in the Agricultural Leadership & Community Education program at Virginia Tech. With her recent acceptance into the ALCE program, assistantship in AgrAbility Virginia and mentoring under Dr. Kim Niewolny, she has begun working and learning more about AgrAbility. She is motivated and excited to assist the program and farmers in any way possible. Crystal has recently begun to network with other veteran farmers through the Veteran Farmers Coalition and other networks. She finds great joy in meeting, networking and talking to other veterans who have found faming a benefit in their lives. Crystal is finding a common theme throughout the veteran community and would like to research this phenomenon as part of her PhD studies. Her overall goal is to improve veteran opportunities in agriculture and their quality of life through and in farming.

AGRABILITY NATIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOP, FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

Join us as we celebrate 25 years of AgrAbility at the 2016 AgrAbility National Training Workshop in Fort Collins, Colorado April 11- 14. Professionals and consumers from all over the country will participate in four days of plenary *sessions, breakouts, tours, networking, and special events*. This year's conference headquarters is the Fort Collins Marriott located near Colorado State University and historic Old Town.

Some of the conference highlights include:

- Pre-conference sessions/tours Monday
- A welcome reception Monday evening;
- Breakout sessions on T-W on many topics with special “unconferencing” sessions to tap the expertise of the participants;
- Tuesday Keynote Luncheon with **Temple Grandin**: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Grandin.
- Silent and live auctions to benefit the farmer/rancher travel stipend program following Wednesday night's banquet and Keynote Address by **Amberly Snyder**: www.ksl.com/?sid=25587619
- Thursday tours featuring local agricultural enterprises and rehabilitation facilities



*Registration open after February 1, 2016: www.agrability.org/ntw/2016/
Rooms are available at the special conference rate of \$109 per night.*

UPDATE FROM THE VIRGINIA BEGINNING FARMER & RANCHER COALITION



The average age of the farmer in the United States has increased significantly in the last decade and bringing new, diverse, and younger farmers into the fold of food and fiber production is increasingly critical to sustain communities locally. The trends are similar in Virginia. *The Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition is a coalition-based and extension-supported initiative that serves as a conduit, not only to educate beginning farmers, but also to connect agricultural organizations and educators with each other in order to coordinate high quality outreach, education, training and resource support across the commonwealth.* The Coalition is represented by a diverse, proven, and committed network that together provides a vibrant resource for beginning farmers and ranchers and service providers in a range of content areas that emphasize a whole farm planning approach to farm start-up. Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension serves as the backbone organization for the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition to facilitate, manage, and evaluate program activity...AgrAbility Virginia is a significant partner of the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition. AgrAbility Virginia has played an important role in the Coalition since 2011, by contributing to expertise in curriculum development, technical assistance, and outreach with the beginning farmer community. *AgrAbility Virginia has especially provided a link for several beginning farmer trainings, webinars, and workshops as they pertain to individual needs to start and stay farming productively and safely...* Most recently, the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition received a \$724,828 federal grant award to sustain and expand the program that established the Coalition in 2010.

This three year grant is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (USDA BRFPD) and offers place-based and culturally appropriate education, training, and networking opportunities for farmers and ranchers with less than 10 years of experience...With AgrAbility Virginia as an essential partner, these USDA grant funds will support people entering farming in Virginia through numerous activities: 1) professional development and networking opportunities for educators and service providers; 2) regional trainings for beginning farmers using the Virginia Whole Farm Planning curriculum; 3) specific "toolkit" materials and strategic trainings in critical topic areas such as access to land, markets, capital, and stewardship best practices; 4) new online learning resources and webinars; 5) and local, peer-mentoring opportunities to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills of experienced farmers with the beginning farmer community. To learn more about the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition and ways to connect, visit www.vabeginningfarmer.org or contact Kim Niewolny, VBFRC Program Director at Virginia Tech: niewolny@vt.edu or 540-231-5784.

Funded through the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) of the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Award Number: 2015-70017-22887.

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA ADVISORY GROUP

The AgrAbility Virginia (AV) Advisory Group, which serves to assist the AgrAbility Virginia Team to effectively and efficiently implement the AgrAbility program by providing guidance on marketing, networking, and education has met twice in 2015. The first time was a face-to-face meeting held at the Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) in the spring, and the second meeting was a conference call held in December. The Group consists of: Dr. William Crutchfield, Virginia State University; Ms. Terrie Webb, produce/flower producer and former AV client; Ms. Beth O'Connor, Executive Director of the Virginia Rural Health Association; Rick Sizemore, Director of WWRC; Robert Krollman, Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), ret.; Renard Turner, farmer, Vanguard Ranch; Dr. Robert Grisso, Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension

AGRABILITY VIRGINIA WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

AgrAbility Virginia has a new website at: www.agrabilityvirginia.org

We also have a new Facebook Page! Like us at:

www.facebook.com/AgrAbility-Virginia-905173346197288/?fref=nf

AgrAbility Virginia has a new brochure! If you would like a few for yourself/agency, please contact Kirk Ballin at the e-mail/tel. below. Thanks!

Contact AgrAbility Virginia at:

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