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## Michigan AgrAbility News

2018 Year in Review

### Get Around to It!

**NED STOLLER | DIRECTOR OF AGRABILITY**

Get around to it. That means do it, not talk about it! After 9 years of waiting, Dennis Fahrni got around to it this September and called AgrAbility. We helped install 3 sets of steps on his John Deere tractors. If he wasn't so tough, he would not have waited so long to call. He thought he could just work through the pain. Years of arthritis and sore knees came to a head when he had a knee replaced and could not be out working the farm. With encouragement from his family he got necessary help and is now saving time and money with a safe way to get on his tractors.

Once farmers learn about AgrAbility, they don't get around to asking our advice for various reasons. Mainly, they are tough, work through the pain, and are optimistic that they will soon heal up. The independent 'can-do' spirit on the farm can make it embarrassing to ask for off-farm help. Farmers are typically busy with more work to do than can be done in a day or lifetime and rely heavily on caregivers to do what they cannot. A weary caregiver once told me "He won't ask anyone for help except me!"

It takes a lot of encouragement from the ag industry for a farmer to get around to it. Dennis finally got around to contacting AgrAbility because his medical condition was putting his whole farm at risk. He had sold down his herd of cattle before knee replacement surgery, could not climb onto any of his tractors, and was sitting in the house hoping to heal. He had known about AgrAbility from our display at the MSU Ag Expo years before. His wife had been encouraging him to seek assistance all that time. The whole agriculture industry can help people get help from AgrAbility.

Equipment dealers, veterinarians, seed and fertilizer sales, cooperatives, MSU extension agents, Farm Bureau and others should encourage farmers struggling with medical conditions to call for help.

Getting around to it earlier saves farmers time and money. The extra steps on Dennis' tractors enable him to do more of his own work with



less fatigue. He can safely climb on and off tractors more quickly with less pain. Working without accommodating for a medical condition makes you at high risk of getting hurt worse or hurting someone else. I know one farmer with serious knee problems whose foot slipped off the clutch and he struck his son with the tractor and broke his leg. A \$200 hand control lever on the clutch could have prevented the accident. Waiting until your medical condition or the pain is so unbearable that you are at the point of quitting or losing the farm is dangerous.

AgrAbility is here to keep farmers working productively and safely despite injury, illness or disability. It is hard for seasoned farmers with busy lives to face the reality that they must get around to making the call for help. Gentle pressure and encouragement from those close to them in the family and farm community will make the difference. Advice from AgrAbility to accommodate the farm will greatly increase the likelihood of success and safety for all involved.

## Partners in AgrAbility

Thank you to the many organizations and individuals who partner with and support Michigan AgrAbility.



800-956-4106 | [www.michiganagrability.org](http://www.michiganagrability.org)

Michigan AgrAbility is a joint project of Easterseals Michigan, Michigan State University Extension and Michigan Farm Bureau. Funding provided by USDA.

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If you're hurting when working, here's your **ROUND TO IT**. Cut it out like a coupon and guard it! It will make you a more productive worker. You've said "When I get around to it." Now that you've got one, call **AGRABILITY 800-956-4106**

# 2018 AgrAbility Snapshot

Number of AgrAbility toll-free line calls: 84

Booths: 8

Presentation: 23

Trade Show/Conference/Training/Meeting: 36

- Number of attendees: 3,113
- Brochures distributed: 1,169
- Business cards distributed: 191

2017 annual survey responses (mailed in 2018):

## Survey Questions

- **Question 1:** Modifications and/or assistive equipment working for you? 66.7% - excellent (level of satisfaction)
- **Question 2:** Your improvement in your ability to work after being served by AgrAbility? 52.9% - excellent (level of satisfaction)
- **Question 3:** Communication and timeliness of service provided by AgrAbility? 63.3% - excellent (level of satisfaction)
- **Question 4:** Information that was provided to you by the AgrAbility staff about assistive technologies and uses? 65% - excellent (level of satisfaction)
- **Question 5:** Overall, what is your satisfaction with AgrAbility? 68.8% - excellent (level of satisfaction)

## Response Rate

- Response rate of 2017 annual survey was 68.7% as compared to 51% and 37.4% for years 2015 and 2016, respectively.

## Remember Gravity is Constant

### DEB CHESTER | INDUSTRIAL HYGIENIST

The following information is excerpted from “Winter repair work presents stability risks” written by Stephanie Leonard and published by Iowa Farmer Today; the full article is available at <https://bit.ly/2AgOMjZ>.

Typical winter activities on the farm include equipment repair and maintenance and...daily opportunities for injuries. Work tasks where hazards exist are often routine, subtle, or unrecognized. Think servicing a vehicle on jacks... Repairing or adjusting equipment without securing it, then applying force that causes the load to shift... Using a loader or chain to suspend equipment so you can inspect it... All these scenarios involve potential for a disastrous outcome: sudden, unexpected movement of large unsupported objects that can shift, fall, strike, crush, pin or roll...on to you.

These are just a few safety tips for setting up when performing equipment repair and maintenance:

- Make sure the surface you work on is level and free of grease and oil. Non-level surfaces allow a load's center of gravity to shift more rapidly to the lower side. Grease and oil can cause YOU to fall.

## Work-Related Farm Injuries Report

- Michigan State University's Occupational and Environmental Medicine Division compiles data on work-related farm injuries in the state of Michigan. All 134 acute care hospitals in Michigan were informed that beginning January 1, 2015 they were required to report all injuries and illnesses related to farming that required hospitalization, emergency department visit or visit to a hospital-based outpatient clinic. “*Work-Related Farm Injuries in Michigan: First Report (January 2015-December 2016)*” is the first report on occupational farm-related injuries in Michigan; it covers two years, 2015 and 2016. The report is available at [www.oem.msu.edu](http://www.oem.msu.edu).

## Key Findings

- There were 1,559 non-fatal work-related farm injury incidents that occurred in 1,525 individuals.
- Seventy-four percent of all farm-related injuries were among men, and 89.5% were among Caucasians.
- The most common parts of the body injured were an upper limb (38.2%), and a lower limb (23.7%).
- The most common types of injury were contusions (26.4%) and fractures (19.9%).
- Owners/operators accounted for 44.1% and hired hands for 42.9% of all individuals injured.
- Injuries caused by cows were the predominant cause and accounted for one third (472; 31.5%) of all the injuries.
- Dairy farms accounted for 39.6% of all cases for which the farm type was recorded by a health care provider.

- Do you have the owner's manual? Yes – check it to determine the recommended lifting points and practices, including blocking and cribbing procedures. No-find a manual before assuming you know the recommended lifting points... you know what happens when you assume...
- Before the equipment lift: Place chocks behind the wheels on both sides (not just one), downhill from the lift. Turn off equipment, set parking brake, take the key.
- Are your jacks, jack stands and chains rated for the load? Check the weight load capacity and inspect them for damage before starting the lift.
- Don't depend on hydraulics to support the equipment or load that you're working under. Jacks can leak down, or slip out from under a load — especially with metal-to-metal contacts — or fail. Jacks with small surface area or jacks set up in the center of the load increase potential for load shifting and accidents.
- Always use a second method of support (eg cribbing or blocking) when equipment is raised above the ground.



## FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Bob Bernard

### BEV BERENS | AGRABILITY OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Bees are inspirational to Bob Bernard, AgrAbility client from Lake City, Michigan. “They live in a cooperative society, they all have a designated job to do, and they accomplish almost unbelievable feats,” he said.

Accomplishing unbelievable feats can also describe the past thirty-one years that Bob has lived on his farm. He was working for the DNR as a wildlife biologist when he became paralyzed from the ribs down. The cause—myelitis; an inflammation of the myelin sheath around the spinal cord, caused by an unknown virus. The funding was already in place for his farm when his illness attacked, so he went ahead, making the move during the fierce winter of 1978.

After some rehabilitation, he regained enough strength and mobility in his legs to walk with crutches, and eventually a tall walking stick. His legs would remain rigid, but by swinging them outward, he could move and work his farm. “I don't think I was always very wise, but I've hung on all these years,” he says of his Earthworks Farm.

The farm is a diversified enterprise which includes logging, bee-keeping, grass-fed cow/calf operation and maple syrup. For the past seventeen years, he has hosted a music festival on the farm, drawing a crowd surpassing 3500 people. The fall festival draws bands from many genres and helps him balance out his life with an opportunity to create room for relationships. “This farm is too big for me all by myself; I needed to share it. People feel like they are home when they come to the festival,” Bob said.

Bob's goal is to improve the land through bio-diversity. He is interested in permaculture, breaking down field sizes with windbreaks and adding fruit and nut trees.

“Help with assistive technology through AgrAbility and Michigan Rehab Services has encouraged me to keep on with my endeavor; it is a signal to me to not slow down, but to continue the course,” Bob said.

Bob had already made many adaptations for himself, especially in his saw mill. He often repurposed things for new uses, and after thirty years, has an intuitive sense of what will and won't work. He has faced his situation as an adventure. “What I can't do with my legs, I can do with my brain,” he added.

With guidance through AgrAbility and financing through Michigan



Rehab Services, Bob's case was one of the most diverse and largest in terms of number of items implemented on his farm. The Kawasaki Mule has completely changed his ability to get around quickly, easily, and into tight spaces on the farm. “This was huge,” he said.

Hand controls on all his tractors have reduced risks he has been taking for all these years, giving access to easy control on equipment.

Ergonomic tractor seats, mirror extensions and adjustable loader forks round out equipment modifications. A shop heater and power doors keep his work area usable year around. Grab bars in the sawmill improve safety and height adjusted folding stools allow Bob to work at a comfortable position when creating a pile of lumber for sale. Spring loaded gates make for easy in-and-out when moving cattle and a power wheel chair improves mobility and access, especially in tight places. A new beehive cart for moving hives and a constant feed evaporator chip burner for syrup production are the final components of his farm's new technology.

Turning a pile of logs into useable lumber provides satisfaction. “You are more in tune with life that way, and by living on the land, you become less rigid, more adaptable, and can adjust with the land,” he said, reciting words that have helped him live a lifetime and make a living on a farm when many would have turned aside after the permanent effects of myelitis.

“I appreciate Ned Stoller for his knowledge and the sense of compassion he brings to his clients,” Bob said. “I appreciate being seen by someone who is capable of seeing what I can still accomplish. The resources that the folks at Michigan Rehabilitation Services put into this farm are immensely valuable on many levels; I am grateful to have been introduced to these folks and the AgrAbility program.”

