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Michigan AgrAbility News

2019 Year in Review

The Gift of Perseverance

NED STOLLER

When David Wielfaert passed away in 2017 after a long battle with multiple sclerosis, his family directed the memorial gifts to Michigan AgrAbility. It is a high honor to receive such a token of appreciation. The memory of David Wielfaert is a tribute to the perseverance of a farm family. Through all the struggles, he loved his family and worked with them to the fullest of his abilities. And his family loved him, lifting his load to the best of their abilities and caring for him with kindness.



The challenge of a weakening farmer watching as his wife and children steadily pick up his workload is only matched by the challenge of a family watching their hard-working Dad's strength wane at the age of 42. And yet there is work to do. There are plants to start, transplant and water. Weeds to fight, crops to harvest, and customers waiting for orders. What does a farm family do? They persevere day after day, month after month, year after year.

David and Cindy Wielfaert were both born and raised on farms, doing greenhouse, vegetable and field crop work. They ordered their own family life in the same way with agriculture as a central theme at D & C Wielfaert Family Farm and Greenhouses. Their children work with them on the farm with the intent of continuing the family tradition. The Wielfaert's raise vegetable produce for wholesale markets, potting plants in their greenhouses, and corn shocks and pumpkins for fall markets.

In the year 2000, David was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. At first he experienced a series of attacks followed by partial disappearance of the symptoms until another attack occurred. Then the disease regressed to a gradual decline in his physical abilities. In 2006 AgrAbility teamed up with Michigan Rehabilitation Services and provided David a platform man-lift and hand controls for his tractor, a concrete work area in his plant-potting greenhouse and an automatic wagon hitch. In 2010 a wheelchair and van modifications were provided when he fell and broke his hip.

AgrAbility worked alongside the Wielfaert family to support them as they persevered. This is the simple explanation of the services we provided to 138 farmers around the state of Michigan this year. In addition to the funds received from public programs, over \$50,000 were donated by farmers and industry partners including the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity, Michigan Farm Bureau, and The Andersons Grain Group. We invite you to join them and the Wielfaert family in giving the gift of perseverance to help even more farmers with injuries and illness this year.

COURTESY PHOTOS



Easterseals Michigan is honored to provide services to farmers through our Michigan AgrAbility program. Our staff partner with Michigan farming communities to provide essential and vital services to farmers in need, including those with injuries, illnesses, or aging conditions, so they can continue the occupation and lifestyle they love.

The impact of this program is larger than just the services provided to the farmers, but what it brings to Easterseals as well. We are able to serve many more individuals in need and strengthen our team by adding culturally competent staff who are able to best serve the farming community as they themselves are farmers. They develop real relationships and quickly gain trust within the farming community. These services also have a much broader impact beyond just the farmers; they are providing food that feeds our nation!

In the Fall of 2018, Michigan AgrAbility was awarded a continuation grant through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The grant funds allow us to serve this community and provide needed equipment to farmers for the program through 2022. This past year, we are excited to share that we had a record number of new farmers seeking help and were able to serve 138 farmers in Michigan!

We are privileged to continue this effort on behalf of Michigan farmers.



Brent Wirth

Brent Wirth
President/CEO

Meet Andrea Garza



My name is Andrea Garza and I have been hired as an Assistive Technology Professional. I am bilingual and will work with and communicate with migrant farm workers. I am currently an Occupational Therapy Assistant with five years of experience. My husband works on an apple farm and trims trees. Because of the repetitive movement and stress on his fingers, he developed trigger-finger, having surgery on many of them. Because of AgrAbility, he obtained an electronic pruner that eases finger stress. I hope to assist migrant workers, educate them on proper ergonomics in the workplace to prevent injuries, decrease pain, and assist in other ways so the worker/farmer can continue to make a living. I live and grew up in Kent City and have two children.

Partners in AgrAbility

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



800-956-4106 | www.michiganagrability.org
Michigan AgrAbility is a joint project of Easterseals Michigan, Michigan State University Extension and Michigan Farm Bureau. Funding provided by USDA.

Help Another Farmer

Donations from folks like you help us help more farmers keep working. Do you have assistive technology you no longer use and would like to donate? We will pick it up for you. Call 800-956-4106.

Financial contributions can be made online or by mail. Designate AgrAbility online at <http://bit.ly/donateAgrability>

or by mail to:

Easterseals Michigan – Development Dept.
2399 E. Walton Blvd.
Auburn Hills, MI 48326

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Michigan AgrAbility Announces Demonstration Farm

BEV BERENS | AGRABILITY OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Michigan AgrAbility has partnered with Holland area farmer, Doug Ver Hoeven, in establishing a demonstration farm where farmers can see and try a variety of assistive technology tools and equipment before investing in aides that can sometimes carry a hefty price tag.

Ver Hoeven has been farming from a wheelchair for over forty years as a result of a vehicle accident while in high school. An AgrAbility client and member of the organization's farmer advisory panel, Ver Hoeven has a wealth of experience and useful information to help farmers select pre-made items or engineer custom assistive technology tools suited for individual needs. Through years of farming, he has accumulated tools, ideas and methods that have helped preserve his working limbs and allowed him to operate his family farm.

He also founded and operates a non-profit, Fulfilling Life Ministries, with the purpose of helping people with disabilities share his passion for the outdoors by helping them find opportunities to learn and enjoy hunting and fishing sports.

"The demonstration farm has been a dream for many years, and something that is really needed in the farming community," said Ned Stoller, Assistive Technology Professional and Michigan AgrAbility

agricultural engineer. "It gives farmers the opportunity to 'try it before you buy it' and gives them a chance to gain ideas by seeing what accommodations another farmer has built."

Included in the demonstration items are lifts, ramps, outdoor mobility vehicles, hitch attachments and simple overhead door handling equipment. Smaller items such as pruners, anti-vibration gloves and easy attachments for hydraulic hoses are just a few of the items incorporated into the project.

The farm is open for individuals or groups by appointment only. To schedule an appointment, contact Michigan AgrAbility at 800-956-4106.

PHOTO BY BEV BERENS



Michigan Rehabilitation Services Farm Rehab

A RESOURCE TO KEEP YOU WORKING

MICHIGAN REHABILITATION SERVICES

The Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) Farm Rehab program in collaboration with Easterseals Michigan AgrAbility continues to strengthen and benefit farmers and farm employees across Michigan by providing access to a variety of resources and supports to enhance their ability to meet productivity and workplace safety standards.

MRS develops customized workforce solutions for both businesses and employees with disabilities. For example, MRS may assist farm workers with disabilities with restoration services, tool and equipment modification, adjustments to systems or processes or implementing assistive devices.

Any individual with a disability engaged in farming, logging or fisheries may be eligible for MRS services. Individuals or businesses may contact the MRS offices directly or they may be referred by the Easterseals Michigan AgrAbility program.

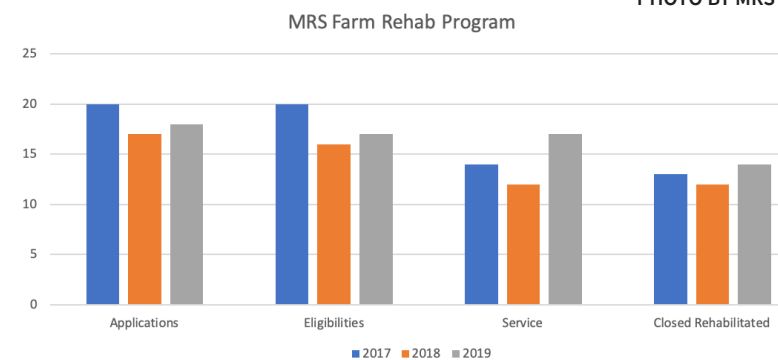
MRS appreciates this partnership as we can work together to allow individuals to continue working safely and productively in the agricultural field.

If you are interested in working with the MRS Farm Rehab Program, contact Carrie Proowski at 989-751-5062 or prosowski@michigan.gov.

The bale grapple, pictured right, mechanically loads groups of small, square bales onto a wagon and can be used to restack them in the barn. The grapple will save Matt from some of the physical wear and tear on his body that a hay operation brings.



PHOTO BY MRS



Non-fatal Injury Risk High in Animal Production

DEB CHESTER | MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Did you know dairy and livestock farms accounted for 63% of all non-fatal work-related farm injuries in Michigan? How do we know this? In 2015, Michigan State University's Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (MSU OEM) began tracking all work-related farm injuries treated at Michigan's hospitals, emergency departments or hospital-based outpatient clinics. Farm injuries treated at other facilities, such as primary care offices, migrant health clinics, urgent care facilities or an out-of-state facility were not included. Between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016, MSU OEM identified 1,559 non-fatal work-related farm injuries in 1,525 individuals. These nonfatal injuries were in addition to 49 agricultural fatalities (21 in 2015 and 28 in 2016) identified during the same time period by the Michigan Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (MIFACE) Program. In contrast to farm-related work fatalities, which are predominately machine related (i.e., tractors), livestock were the most common source of nonfatal injuries in Michigan (See Table 1).

Machines other than a tractor included combine, corn husker, auger and hay baler. Category "Other" includes different types of injury sources (i.e., being struck by barn door, dropping a heavy object on a hand, being cut by a tree branch, running into a pole while going after a cow) that did not fall into the ten defined categories. For more information about this study, go to <https://oem.msu.edu/index.php/resources>, scroll down to MSU Peer Reviewed Articles section, then look for Kica J, Rosenman KD. *Multisource surveillance for non-fatal work-related agricultural injuries*. To learn more about safe animal handling to reduce injury risk, you can access the MSU OEM hazard alert: Safe Animal Handling to Prevent Farm-Related Injuries and Deaths by going to <https://oem.msu.edu/index.php/work-related-injuries/miface-hazard-alerts>.

TABLE 1. CAUSE OF NON-FATAL WORK RELATED FARM INJURIES, MICHIGAN 2015-2016

CAUSE OF INJURY	%
Cattle	31.5
Other	19.7
Machines other than tractors	10.4
Fall from height	8.6
Fall at ground level	7.6
Livestock (other than cattle or horse)	6.8
Tractor	6.6
Horse	3.9
Tool	3.9
Chemical	0.7
Poultry	0.3



FARMER SPOTLIGHT

Matt Liebetreu



BEV BERENS | AGRABILITY OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Many things changed for Matt Liebetreu on July 28, 2018.

It was a hot summer day. Hay was on the ground waiting to be made; rain in the forecast. Matt noticed the round baler plugging—a clump of wet hay clogging the works. Wet hay on moving belts is a fire hazard so he grabbed the clump to yank it from the baler. Simultaneous with his grab, rollers snatched the clump, pulling Matt into the machine. As he struggled to get out, the baler pulled him further in.

His shouts were eventually heard by a neighbor a half mile away who fetched Matt's dad; he was working in the field next door. Once the paramedics arrived, it took another 25-30 minutes to extract Matt from the entanglement while he instructed first responders on where to locate the bolt that would release the roller and free his arm.

He was rushed to the local hospital, then airlifted to the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. Beyond saving, his right hand was amputated three inches below the elbow. This was the first of many changes Matt would face.

The right-handed twenty-six-year-old farmer/electrician from St. Clair, Michigan recovered. But the future of continuing to farm his grandfather's farm side by side with his father began to look impossible. It was a depressing possibility and another change in his life.

A trip to Ohio Farm Science Review introduced Matt to Ohio AgrAbility. He left with a contact for Michigan AgrAbility.

After meeting with Ned Stoller, Michigan AgrAbility Assistive Technology Professional, there was another change; hope returned.

(Note: AgrAbility isn't a hero on a white horse, swooping in to fix everything and it can't turn back the clock. It can help implement a plan to continue the farming operation—with changes.)

Matt and his father farm 270 acres of row crops and 200 acres of hay, primarily sold locally in small square bales. "It is labor intensive and baling help is hard to find," Matt said.

Through Michigan Rehabilitation Services and Rehab Counselor Lucy Maines with AgrAbility assistance, Matt obtained a 10-bale accumulator, a grapple for the tractor to move bales on and off of the wagon, gauges to monitor grain

PHOTOS BY BEV BERENS



levels in the bin for finishing cattle, single motion gate latches and a side by side utility vehicle. Matt added and paid for an enclosed cab and heat upgrades himself.

"Using the accumulator and grapple is definitely a learning curve," Matt said. With practice, he expects to soon stack neat wagon loads. "The equipment definitely makes the job a lot less labor intensive."

Since the accident, Matt and his father have even expanded and diversified the farm while looking to the future. They built a hoop barn for hay storage which provides enough overhead room to safely and efficiently stack square bales. Another hoop building is in the

works for raising meat goats. New farm perimeter fencing will secure their cow/calf herd and future goats within the property.

To keep farming, some things had to change. "Of course, technology changed here on the farm," Matt said. "There are some larger and daily challenges like greasing machinery. Having a battery-operated grease gun is nice but putting the wand on and holding it back while pointing triggers is a little bit challenging. Hydraulic fittings are another. Working two wrenches simultaneously is sometimes a challenge; you have to be real strategic in how you do that. Heavy maintenance like changing out tires now sometimes requires two people."

"We have also learned that having a nail gun is a blessing."

Matt has learned much about himself, life, friends and neighbors and doesn't take things for granted. "My self-taught life lesson is things that you think will always be there aren't guaranteed. You really take your hands for granted until you are only dealing with one."

"I also view people differently. I am more understanding that everybody has issues whether it be seen or internal battles. Everyone is battling something, so you kind of got to just be more forgiving and more willing to accept people for the way they are."

Matt has a new appreciation for his community and neighbors. More people than he could imagine helped without being asked. Word spread about Matt's accident by the time he was in the ambulance. Two farmers showed up to finish baling, pick up the hay and put away equipment. In the meantime, the volunteers' down hay got rained upon. Other farmers baled and loaded hay during the day so cousins and uncles could unload into the barn at night leaving empty wagons for the neighbors to refill the next day. "It was a tearful moment for us to have someone take care of what we considered to be normal tasks. It was huge. They put us before themselves," he said of his local farming community.

Since the accident, Matt has a little more time. He dedicated a piece of that to working as a superintendent for Meghan Tomasek's special needs 4H club. Members show size appropriate animals with superintendent assistance during the fair. "Most of the kids can do very little with sports so they feel really good about showing an animal at the fair," Matt said. "It feels real good to be a small part of that, even though mostly I just do what I am told to do," he laughs.

"My disability made me more understanding of what they were going through."

UPCOMING EVENTS



Michigan Farm Bureau Annual Meeting

Amway Grand Plaza Hotel
Grand Rapids, MI



Great Lakes Fruit and Vegetable Growers Expo

DeVos Place Conference Center
Grand Rapids, MI



AgrAbility Virtual Training Workshop

www.agrability.org



Alpha Gamma Rho Beef Preview Show

MSU Livestock Pavilion
Lansing, MI



Michigan Family Farms Conference

Kalamazoo Valley Community College
Kalamazoo, MI



AgrAbility National Training Workshop

Madison, WI