



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

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CARM'S COMMENTS - Carmen Schacht

The topic for this month is assistive technology. As I have mentioned before, it is my privilege to visit with many of you. I have really learned a lot. I AM NOT mechanically minded, but I have a good imagination as I listen to you. Having an accessible van, I know a few things about improvements for people with disabilities. Some of you have the ingenuity to do many of your own adaptations.

A woman who has a spinal injury and runs a combine took the front off the combine's platform and replaced it with a hydraulic lift to get into the cab. Many farmers just add extra steps to make it easier to get into a tractor.

A farmer with a fairly recent disability is working with his dad and uncle to create a lift to get him into the tractor. A person who has quadriplegia put cup hooks on controls

that turn the reel on the combine. He also glued a cross piece on his radio and air conditioning knobs so that he can turn them more easily.

With the help of his dad, a person who has paraplegia built a hydraulic lift to get him into a JD4755 tractor and a similar lift to get him into the combine. He also mounted levers on the brake pedals.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WHEN YOU MAKE ADAPTATIONS IS TO WATCH FOR FRAYING CABLES. SAFETY IS OF NUMBER ONE PRIORITY. People with disabilities don't need a second injury. (CS)

WARREN JUST DOES IT! - Lorrie Long

Warren Koch has learned a lot about assistive technology since he incurred a neck injury following a car accident in 1970. Before he was released from nine months of hospitalization and rehabilitation, Warren had his car equipped with hand controls. After all, he was a young man who had just graduated from high school in 1969, and liked to get out and about! He had a bunch of friends, too, who he enjoyed being with.

Warren's doctor in Iowa City didn't think much about his desire to get into agriculture, but Warren, who now resides near Miles and has 5-6 quadriplegia as a result of his

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accident 30 years ago, wanted to give farming a chance to see if he could do it. He wondered how the public was going to take his being in a wheelchair. But, as is typical of Warren, he decided, "if somebody doesn't like it, that's okay; I'm going to do it!" He found that the small town atmosphere of his community meant he had a tremendous amount of support from his neighbors and friends.

Back on the farm, a man from the local machine shop put hand controls on one of his dad's tractors, and Warren was able to get in and out of the cab by sliding through the rear window with the help of his dad and his sister, Wanda. Unfortunately, Warren found that his body wasn't ready for the rough treatment of farming. For the first year, Warren could only work for an hour-and-a-half to two hours a day. He'd field cultivate or do a task where precision wasn't of importance. With perseverance, Warren was able to work four to five hours the next year, and by the third year, he was able to do anything he wanted on the farm. Today he has no problem working a full day, but he still needs someone to help him. Warren realizes he is never totally independent.

It was the mid '80s that Warren was contacted by representatives of the Easter Seals Iowa FaRM program, who were looking for farmers with disabilities in Iowa. At the time, Warren was still accessing his tractor through the rear window when he first met with Easter Seals FaRM program staff. Easter Seals put Warren in contact with another farmer who had a lift on his tractor, and Warren and his family determined that was what they needed to help Warren safely access his tractor. The next year the Koch family bought a White tractor because the instrument panel sits off to the right side and there is head clearance above the door, and the local machine shop constructed and installed a lift. The lift includes a track fastened to the top back of

the tractor cab's frame and outside to the tractor wheel. A 12-foot wench hangs off the roller that operates electrically to lift and roll him into the cab. Warren needs one person to help him get into/out of the sling and to fasten/unfasten the hook to the sling.

The family later bought a second tractor and had a lift similar to that on the first tractor installed on it. Warren says, "I used to get on our tractor without a cab by hanging from a log chain under a load bucket, 12 feet in the air, and Dad would set me down on the tractor seat. It wasn't safety approved, but it worked."

Safety? Warren urges people to use common sense, and if a task appears to be too dangerous, then don't do it. "For people who are disabled, safety is a different deal than for the average person. Being in a cab keeps you out of the dirt, protects you from frostbite in the winter and keeps you cool in the summer, which is especially important if you don't sweat. You should unhook equipment on level ground."

Warren was enlisted as a support person for the FaRM Program (also known as the Iowa AgrAbility program, a joint program of Easter Seals Iowa's FaRM program and Iowa State University Extension) and he has been doing this work ever since. Today, he leads a peer support group for the AgrAbility Friends and Family program in Jackson and Clinton counties, and contacts persons who have a disability similar to his, serving as a source of support and information.

The FaRM program's Mobile Rural Assistive Technology Unit has also assisted Warren. Years ago, Easter Seals FaRM staff traveled to Warren's family farm and constructed a device that fits around Warren's hand to help him hold a pen for writing, since he doesn't have the use of his fingers. Today, AgrAbility's priority is to

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look within a farmer's community for assistance. If no one is nearby who can do the work, an AgrAbility specialist will enlist the Mobile Assistive Technology Unit to construct - on site - needed assistive technologies.

While Warren has not needed the assistance of an ISU Extension Housing Specialist, he has appreciated the advice of Virgil Schmitt, the ISU Crop Fields Specialist in his area. The strength resident in AgrAbility comes from combining the expertise of Easter Seals Iowa's FaRM program, whose purpose is to help farm families with disabilities achieve greater independence through assistive technology and rehabilitation services, and ISU Extension's expertise on a wide range of agricultural, business, community, and family issues including housing, nutrition, and family relationships.

In closing Warren emphasizes, "one of the worst possible things a person with a disability can do is get up in the morning and sit. You need to be active to increase blood circulation and muscle control, to decrease swelling and to prevent pressure sores. It helps the whole system to stay in better condition." In addition, Warren exclaims, "the best part of the whole deal is to get out and help other people who have a disability!"

The goal of AgrAbility is to help farm families with disabilities stay engaged in life. Warren is a good example of ways that assistive technology can make it easier for persons with disabilities to interact with their environment. Iowa AgrAbility supports and appreciates Warren and his family. (LL)

SAFETY FIRST - Lorrie Long

I asked Dr. Steven Freeman, a farm safety Specialist at ISU, for some advice on safety and the use of innovative lifts on the farm.

Steve comments, "I would be concerned about anyone using a pulley and rope or a cable winch as the basis for a lift. The safety issues involve the braking system: if the system fails or the winch loses power, will the system catch the user or will they just drop?"

"For example, a generic electric winch (that you might buy at Sears to put on a pickup or 4x4) has no brake. If the system loses power, the load will not be supported. Additionally, without a backup system - if the battery or electrical system fails (worst case being a fire) is the operator going to be stranded in the cab of the combine or tractor?" (LL)

RESOURCES:

Iowa AgrAbility will come to your home to help you find ways to adapt your farm and home operations so that you can continue to live independently. You can read about programs available to farm families in the AgrAbility brochure (www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/resources.html). In addition, check out the many resources available for persons with disabilities listed on the ISU Extension Housing website (or call 515-294-8520): www.extension.iastate.edu/housing/elderly/assistiveTechnology.html or contact Easter Seals Iowa <http://nncf.unl.edu/nrrs/index/E/id501113.html> for information on the Assistive Technology Equipment Loan program, plus other services for people with disabilities (or call 515-289-1933).

The summer National AgrAbility Quarterly provides information and stories about three commercially available lifts that national AgrAbility staff most commonly recommend for farmers who need assistance accessing farm machinery or vehicles. Go to <http://www.agrabilityproject.org> and click AgrAbility Quarterly Newsletter located on

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the left side bar. That will allow you to open the Summer 2001, Vol 1, No 2 newsletter.

Infotech is an information and referral service that includes access to used equipment. Contact the Center for Disabilities and Development in Iowa City by clicking on <http://www.uiowa.edu/infotech/InfoTech.htm> or by calling 800-331-3027. You will find a comprehensive list of assistive technology devices for ambulation, communication, transportation, vision technology, working animals, etc. (LL)

AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

ISU Extension provides many opportunities, across the state, for agricultural experiences. Check the Calendar of Events at <http://dbs.extension.iastate.edu/calendar/> for information on farmers' markets, forestry field days and opportunities to be part of the Master Conservation class, the Master Gardener Training, and the Master Woodland Managers program. There is also information on a Feasibility Studies workshop where you can learn how to complete a study before purchasing new equipment, starting a new company, expanding or acquiring facilities.

Contact your county Extension office located at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Counties/state.html> to access an ISU Extension Field Specialist for expert advice on agricultural engineering, issues dealing with livestock and crop management or farm management, <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/ag/fs.html>. Pick up a free pocket guide (ICM 1) from your County Extension office for recording herbicide, insecticide, and manure application information. The guide also contains phone numbers for regional Department of Natural Resources field offices and an emergency number for

reporting chemical and manure spills. Orders may also be placed by calling ISU Extension Distribution Center (515) 294-5247 or via the Web at www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/Order.html. (LL)

A REQUEST

Now is a good time to conduct a safety audit of your equipment. Make sure all light bulbs are working and reflectors are in good condition. Make sure your Slow-Moving-Vehicle emblems are firmly attached and easily visible. Make sure shields on your power take-offs are firmly attached and are not damaged. Make sure your rollover protective structure and seat belts are in place. Discuss key safety issues with your family. Contact your County Extension office for more information about farm safety. (Information taken from AgrAbility News, AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians <http://agexted.cas.psu.edu/agrab>) (LL)

THANKS! - Lorrie Long

I shall always treasure this time I have had with you and the AgrAbility program. You have shared with me your determination to make life good regardless of the circumstances. You have shown me how to adapt to situations beyond my control. I have learned that quality of life is not in my physical attributes but quality of life comes from the spirit within me. While AgrAbility is a resource for you, you are also a resource for AgrAbility as you support other farm families with disabilities. I will be leaving employment at ISU and AgrAbility at the end of this month to begin a new adventure with Graceland University in southern Iowa. I will not forget you and hope to have occasions to see and share with you again. Thanks for all you've given to me and thanks for what you will continue to give to each other! (LL)

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AGRABILITY FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Freewheelers

--September 8 1:00, The Depot Restaurant, S Frederick, Oelwein (formerly Country Kitchen; use side entrance)
--Menu: Baked chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, salad bar, drink. All you can eat (\$5.95 plus gratuity).
-- Join Us! Contact Carmen (563-547-2932) by Sept. 5 if you plan to attend.

Southeast Iowa AgrAbility Friends and Family

--October 6 Tipton Pizza Hut
--More details next month (Ron Bradley and Dennis Byrnes)

West Central Iowa AgrAbility Friends and Family

--August 27
--Crawford County Memorial Hospital Conference Room A
--Denison (LeRoy and Carol Haberl)

Find the AgrAbility Friends and Family leader nearest you and give him/her a call if you would like to offer your support or share informally with other farm families with disabilities. Call Carmen Schacht, 563-547-2932, or access:
www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/friends-and-family.html

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

AgrAbility Program Specialist
96 LeBaron Hall, Ames, IA 50011
Phone: ISU Answerline at 1-800-262-3804
TDD: 1-800-854-1658.
Web site: www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/

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