

## Kudos Aplenty at AgrAbility 25th Celebration

ARLINGTON--“Thank you” was the phrase of the day at a 25-year celebration of the AgrAbility of Wisconsin program here Sept. 29.

Program organizers, farmers who have received services, and representatives of partner organizations all heaped praise on the 25-year-old program that is designed to provide assistive services to farmers living with an injury, disability or limitation. During the program’s 25-year history, it has assisted about 2,700 Wisconsin farmers.

AgrAbility of Wisconsin is a partnership between UW Cooperative Extension and Easter Seals Wisconsin. AgrAbility does not provide direct funding or equipment, but often works with the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and other funding sources to help customers obtain needed assistive technologies and modifications.

The Wisconsin program is one of 22 AgrAbility programs across the country, but has been by far the most successful, according to program director Richard Straub. Between 30 and 40 percent of all participants nationwide are in Wisconsin, he said.

“Part of it is the tremendous partnerships we’ve had with DVR, Easter Seals, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and others,” Straub said. “What’s really important about our services are the people. We impact the lives of our clients and allow them to continue to contribute to agriculture.”

When the program was kicked off in Wisconsin in 1991, it helped about 22 clients during the first year. That number has steadily grown to about 2,500 this year, although Straub said program returnees make the 25-year total closer to 2,700.

A U.S. Department of Agriculture grant of about \$180,000 a year helps pay for staff and program coordination, Straub said.

Three clients who have received services from the program participated in a panel discussion during the 25-year celebration.

Keith Posselt of Hortonville fell from a silo 19 years ago and suffered a spinal cord injury, resulting in lower-extremity paralysis.

“I had to modify my routine fairly quickly (if I wanted to continue farming),” Posselt said. Among the modifications made on his farm were lifts that helped him get in and out of tractors, conveyors to help him feed animals and hydraulic tractor hitches to make it easier to hook onto equipment.

Posselt, who raises beef and grows cash crops, was recovering from his injuries in the hospital when he was told about the AgrAbility program.

“I needed a way to get back in the tractor and modifications to do what I was doing before,” he said. “I enjoy the variety of work I do as a farmer. Every day is a different challenge. That’s why I wanted to continue doing what I do.”

Mary Dunn, a farmer from Mineral Point, has been able to continue farming despite having part of her leg amputated.

With help from the program, she began using an electric feed cart to replace a manual wheelbarrow, extra steps to get on and off her tractors, and purchased a Gator to meander around the farm.

“If I can’t do something with the Gator, it’s not worth doing,” Dunn said. “You don’t think you need that much help, but after the improvements are made to make things easier, you think you should have made them years sooner.”

Alan Kaltenberg lost his arm 51 years ago in a childhood farming accident, but has found ways to continue farming despite the disability. He raises beef cattle and cash crops on his farm near Arlington.

The AgrAbility program helped Kaltenberg get a grinding mill with hydraulic controls, a lift to replace ladders and adaptations to his skid loader so he can operate it with one hand and his feet.

Kaltenberg said he had been farming without assistive technologies until he learned about the help he could get through the AgrAbility program.

“These are things you don’t think of — there are easier and better ways,” he said.

Wisconsin Agriculture Secretary Ben Brancel described the AgrAbility program as “something very unique to this state.”

“This program has had a substantial impact on individual lives,” he said. “A lot of times we debate about big issues involving a big number of people. This program talks about a life of a person, and every person counts.”

Brancel said every one of the people who need help through the program find themselves in a situation they didn’t ask for and never envisioned they would be in.

“The program helps people with sometimes simple solutions and sometimes very complex solutions, so they can continue doing what they love and being involved in food production,” Brancel said.

Brancel said the agriculture industry owes the program’s original organizer, Ron Schuler, and those who have followed “a debt of gratitude” for keeping the program strong for 25 years.

“Twenty-five years has a lot to show for it and 25 more years will be necessary,” Brancel said.

Straub took over as program director when Schuler retired, and said Brian Luck, a professor in the UW-Madison Biological Systems Engineering Department, is being groomed to take over when he steps down from the leadership role.

“We need to make sure this program moves into the next generation and is successful for a long time,” Straub said. “Brian has expressed an interest in AgrAbility and wants to step up and take over leadership of the program when I decide to retire.”

JIM MASSEY, The Country Today



Grant Year 2015-2016

### Client Demographics

AgrAbility of Wisconsin project staff reported serving 508 farmers and ranchers with disabilities during their respective 2015- 2016 Reporting Period (RP). This RP begins with the individual project beginning date of September 1, 2015 and ends on August 31, 2016 for all projects. This brief report includes information for only the AgrAbility of Wisconsin project which is funded by USDA/NIFA. Most of the clients served were employed full time as the owner/operator of the farm or ranch and were male. The three most common primary types of agricultural operations are dairy, livestock, and field/grain operations. The leading primary disabilities were

joint injuries, followed by back injuries, arthritis, amputations, heart disease and orthopedic injuries.

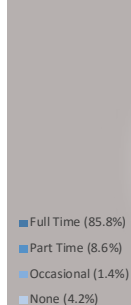
The reporting method for the current RP included data provided by our project using the templates developed by the Wisconsin NAP. It should be noted that the total Percentage reported in tables rarely equals 100 percent due to rounding.

Owner/Operator: 81.7%  
Spouse/Partner: 12.8%  
Dependent Adult: 0.8%  
Employee: 2.8%  
Other: 1.9%

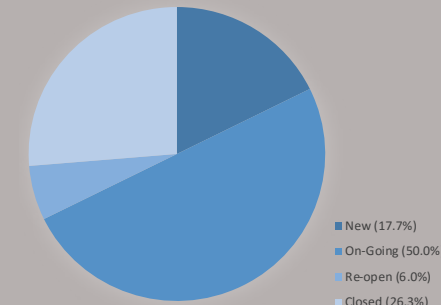
Mean Age: 55.2 years  
Age Range: 19-91  
Male Clientele: 80.70%  
Female Clientele: 19.30%  
Past Military Service: 2.70%  
Amish/Mennonite: 0.7%

Caucasian: 98.5%  
Native American: 0.7%  
African American: 0.7%

### Work Status



### Client Status



**AgrAbility of Wisconsin Director:**  
Richard Straub

**AgrAbility of Wisconsin Co-Director:**  
Brian Luck

**FARM Program Director:**  
Paul Leverenz

**Outreach Specialist:**  
Abigail Jensen  
Hannah Barthels (Previous)

**Case Managers:**  
T Ellenbecker  
Paul Uniet

**Rural Rehabilitation Specialists:**  
Jeff Kratochwill  
Ami Cooper

**FARM Technical Assistants:**  
Melba Brown  
Mo Bebow-Reinhardt

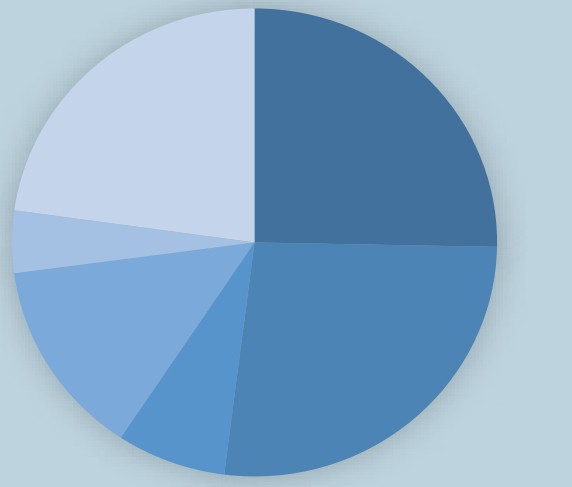
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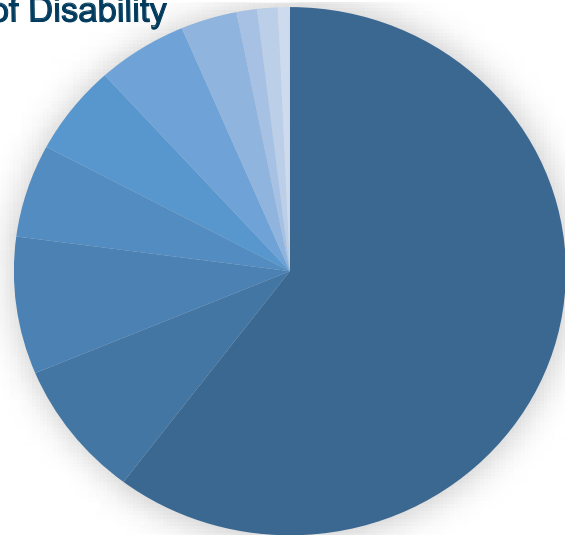


### Primary Disabling Conditions

- Back Injury (25.3%)
- Joint Injury (26.7%)
- Amputation (7.3%)
- Arthritis (13.6%)
- Heart Disease (4.3%)
- Other



### Origin of Disability



- Chronic Illness (60.3%)
- Non-ag vehicular incident (8.4%)
- Other non-ag incident (8.4%)
- Machinery-related (5.7%)
- Other ag incident (5.5%)
- Ag-related falls (5.3%)
- Animal-related injury (3.3%)
- Non-ag recreational (1.2%)
- Non-ag related falls (1.2%)
- Ag-related vehicular incident (0.7%)

### First-Reported Agricultural Enterprises

Type of Operation	Percent
Dairy	53.6%
Livestock	23.2%
Field/Grain Crops	13.0%
Other*	10.2%

\*Others include poultry, swine, vegetables, specialty crops and more

Over the last year, educational activities have included visits to occupational therapy classes and high school FFA classes. AAW educates these students through assistive technology, avoiding secondary injuries, and AAW services. Farmsite visits, PowerPoint and video presentations, case studies, printed resources, and group discussions are used to share information.



The annual summit was held at the new Organic Valley office in Cashton, Wis. With the help of Easter Seals FARM team, Wisconsin Farm Center, and Organic Valley, the event was a great success.

### Farm and Trade Shows 2015-2016

- Chippewa Valley Farm City Day, Sept 12
- CALS Career Fair, Sept 17
- Options for Independent Living Assistive Technology Resource Fair, Sept 23
- ANRE Conference- WI Dells, Oct 16-18
- Occupational Therapy Class- MATC, Oct 26
- Neighbor-to-Neighbor Meeting, Oct 27
- La Crosse Farm Show- La Crosse, Jan 13-14
- Rock County Ag Showcase- Janesville, Jan 28
- Wisconsin Farmers Union Conference, Jan 28-29
- Marshfield Mall Farm Show- Marshfield, Feb 17-18
- MOSES Organic Farming Conference, Feb 25-27
- Eau Claire Farm Show- Eau Claire, Mar 8-9
- PDPW Business Conference, Mar 17
- WPS Farm Show- Oshkosh, Mar 29-31
- Midwest Horse Sale, Apr 6-8
- AgrAbility National Training Workshop, Apr 11-14
- JCEP Conference, Apr 19
- Kewaunee County Rural Safety Day- Kewaunee, May 25
- WI FFA Convention, Jun 13-16
- Health Fair and Wheelchair Wash, Jun 18
- WI Farm Tech Days, Jul 19-21
- Neighbor to Neighbor Meeting, Jul 27
- Neighbor to Neighbor Meeting, Aug 10
- Brian Luck Outreach Presentations: 20, throughout the state

### Media Exposure 2015-2016

- AgrAbility still on track in Wisconsin*
- Eau Claire farmer regains efficiency after AgrAbility steps in*
- WPS farm show draws big crowd*
- Geneva Lake featured in Innovation Square Wisconsin State Farmer*
- Disabilities not an obstacle*
- Helping farmers to be farmers*
- AgrAbility Summit offers tours, planning help*
- Education Square to be abuzz with learning*
- Innovation Square showcases today's innovations*
- AgriView
- AgrAbility to celebrate 25 years in 2016*
- AgrAbility program helps Wathke keep farming*
- The Country Today
- Providing Assistive Technology*
- Preparing for Then, Now*
- Dairy Star
- AgrAbility of Wisconsin Celebrating 25 Years of Service*
- Wisconsin Ag Connection
- Helping the farmers who put food on the Thanksgiving table*
- Wisconsin State Journal

### NETWORKING

AAW has maintained a partnership with Easter Seals of Wisconsin and DVR to provide on-site farm assessments for clients.

AAW recruits farmers and maintains a list of those who agree to let new clients reach out to them to learn about the program from a current or past client. In the next upcoming year, this list will be updated to include farmers from all the counties and more contact names.

Neighbor-to-Neighbor meetings are hosted on farms of clients, where individuals have the opportunity to network and share their experiences concerning disabilities and rehabilitation. There are 3-4 meetings each year with an average attendance between 3-15 current, former, and ongoing AAW clients.

### EVENTS & ACTIVITIES



AgrAbility staff hosted a booth in the new Innovation Square at the Farm Technology Days held in Walworth County July 19th through 21st. The booth also featured Action Trackchairs and Chad Hermanson, a representative and user of Action Trackchairs.



AgrAbility of Wisconsin received the Spirit of Bob Henry Award presented by Steve Henry and the Henry family at the Midwest Farm Show in La Crosse, Wis. on January 13th.