

## Partners #11/AgrAbility

Partners is a video magazine produced by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES).

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## Partners #11/AgrAbility

:30 Promo

**Announcer:** This time on Partners, it's all about AgrAbility. From a Kentucky farmer's struggle to regain his life passion...  
To an Oklahoma case worker's deft skill at physical rehabilitation...  
To a Wisconsin dairy woman's quest to overcome debilitating arthritis...  
AgrAbility is hard at work across America.

**Brad Rein, AgrAbility National Program Leader, CSREES:** We're investing in people. People who can change the lives of our clientele, and we're making some terrific investments.

## Partners #11/AgrAbility

28:00 Episode

**Announcer:** This time on Partners, it's all about AgrAbility....

**Carol Maus, National AgrAbility Project Director, Easter Seals:** The point of the program is to help farmers and ranchers and their families succeed in agriculture.

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To a Wisconsin dairy woman's quest to overcome debilitating arthritis...  
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**Announcer:** Welcome to Partners! In the next half-hour, we'll travel the nation and see breakthrough work in research, education and Extension. That's what CSREES is all about - helping universities generate valuable knowledge for those who need it and educating our next generation of Americans. And now, it's time for Partners!

The farm is a dangerous place. Agriculture is considered one of the most hazardous industries in America. Every year over 100,000 agricultural workers are injured at the job site. And the consequences for family and community can be disastrous.

Those who become disabled often live in somewhat isolated areas with limited economic opportunities. Farming may be their only way to make a living. And for most, it's not just an occupation, but a highly desired and chosen life style.

In response to this problem, Congress included funds for disabled farmers in the 1990 Farm Bill. The Cooperative State Research, Education & Extension Service of USDA then began the AgrAbility program, awarding grants up to \$150,000 for state-based projects that assist America's handicapped farmers. CSREES partnered with land-grant universities, Easter Seals and other non-profit disability groups to make this program a reality.

**Colien Hefferan, Administrator-CSREES:** AgrAbility is a very interesting program. It focuses on people and those people then help to sustain systems in agriculture that would be lost without it.

**Announcer:** To date, there have been projects in 30 states fueled by \$4 million of CSREES funds. Here are just a few stories about how AgrAbility has changed people's lives in rural America.

Allen Hicks had been working as an office manager at this small town car dealership for decades. He made a good living at it. Then something went terribly wrong.

**Allen Hicks, Kentucky Farmer:** I work here at the dealership, but also run a farm that's nearby. It had been a wet spring that year. I was behind. My baler had been acting up. I was trying to figure what was going on and I climbed up on top of it. And was standing on the top and I leaned down to look and I can't remember after that if I slipped or lost my balance.

**Announcer:** After falling, Allen's hands became caught in the moving belts of the machine. He tried repeatedly to free himself with no success.

**Allen Hicks:** I knew it my heart – I guess 'cause I was laying out there in the field for an hour – that I had accepted that I lost my hands. I was just begging to live and felt lucky to live so it didn't really bother me. I don't know why.

**Announcer:** In spite of having both hands amputated, Allen returned to his office job, just 6 days after his devastating accident. But he still faced another challenge at his farm, fourteen miles down Highway 61.

**Allen Hicks:** Basically, I do a lot of square bales of hay, alfalfa, & orchard grass for horse farmers. That's my main cash crop. I also got beef cattle, which I think about every farm in KY - somebody's got a few beef cattle running around.

There's nothing like the peace & quiet out here that after you work in a public job you can enjoy that even more. I've always have been independent, and if I wanted to do something, I did it. Now, there are things that I have to have people help me to do. With planning, I'd figured I could do it. And with people's help, I've been able to do it.

**Announcer:** One of those people that helped Allen was John Hancock. John works for the University of Kentucky's AgrAbility program, serving disabled farmers throughout the state.

**John Hancock, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension:** Our Kentucky program started in 1993. We received our first funding from

USDA. I think that the majority of the people that we work with, it really makes a difference in their lives.

I enjoy it. You meet some lifelong friends. Like me and Allen have become real good friends and have a lot of things in common. Once I heard about what happened and what the result was, I really didn't want to come down here. How do you help somebody that lost both hands?

**Announcer:** John knew exactly what Allen Hicks needed, and went to work. He helped Allen install a hydraulic system that easily opens & closes a hay harvesting rake. He supplied key extensions, allowing Allen to conveniently start his vehicles. And he encouraged Allen that things would get better, even if some days appeared bleak. And after spending 20 years wheel chair-bound due to a motorcycle accident, John was well prepared to help Allen with the mental aspects of being physically impaired.

**Allen Hicks:** It just sort of amazed me that he was doing this program being in the condition that he was. He's had some setbacks in his life, but it don't look like it's bothering him any. He's trying to help people so that inspired me.

**John Hancock:** We've had some pretty serious talks about what he can do and what he can't do. It seems like he never focuses on what he can't do very long. I don't think he's had any problems with the big stuff, what I call the 'heavy tech' as far as the tractors and trucks and getting on and off them.

**Allen Hicks:** Howdy John.

**John Hancock:** Going to bale it today?

Some of the finer motor needs when you're working up close like that – that's what we're focusing on now.

Came up with a way we can modify that parking brake.

**Allen Hicks:** You did? Well, good. Do you have it with you?

**John Hancock:** Yep... Let's go take a look. Allen, this is something I wanted to show you in addition to the parking brake.

**Allen Hicks:** Uh huh.

**John Hancock:** This is how you can hook your hydraulics up & unhook them.

**Announcer:** John's also working with Allen on easier ways to open tractor doors, set emergency brakes and hitch up hay wagons. But in its quest to serve disabled farmers, AgrAbility is always a cooperative effort involving several agencies.

**John Hancock:** Every farmer that we go see, needs some type of assisted technology. And that's what Kentucky Vocational Rehab does, provide funding for assisted technology that will help somebody continue working after a disability.

**Announcer:** Ivy Alexander supplied Allen with office solutions to make his work behind the desk more efficient. Soon she will help make his house more user-friendly. Ivy is a rehabilitation engineer for the State's Department of Workforce Investment. They, Cooperative Extension, and Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital comprise Kentucky AgrAbility's partnership.

**Allen Hicks:** They gave me a roller ball mouse instead of the other mouse because when you'd move the mouse and go to click it, you'd hit it- it would move. Now I have a roller ball mouse with buttons that the state gave me. It's outstanding. I really like it. They've been helpful.

**Announcer:** But Allen's real passion for work lies on the farm. And with AgrAbility's help, he's now looking forward toward the future.

**Allen Hicks:** My goal is to get in about 15-18 thousand square bales a year and maybe pump that up to 20,000 when I get everything running the way I want it to and with my equipment modified to help me with my hands.

**John Hancock:** I'd say 10 years from now he'll be farming 3 times as much as he is now because he likes it so much & he's successful. And he'll probably still be at the dealership.

**Announcer:** Approximately 80% of farmers with disabilities have suffered secondary injuries while farming. AgrAbility specialists stress safety in accommodating disability in agriculture.

**Tracy Keninger, Easter Seals-Iowa:** I've been working with AgrAbility here in Iowa since its initiation in 1991. My dad acquired a disability when I was very young and soon learned the impact a disability has on a farm family.

As a small child I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was motivated to really give back.

**Announcer:** Tracy Keninger has given back. She serves as director of Easter Seals/Iowa, a partner in one of the first AgrAbility programs.

**Tracy Keninger:** Our expertise at Easter Seals/Iowa is truly the on-site farm assessment and looking at the agricultural components of continuing to be gainful after acquiring a disability.

**Announcer:** After the assessment, work begins back at the office.

**Tracy Keninger:** The CAD drawing is a preliminary drawing that we use to help identify what modifications would be used on a particular tractor. And we use it as a point of discussion not only with the farmers, but with the machinist who is building and ultimately designing the lift that's going to be used on the tractor.

Chuck, we were looking here at the platform lift. Do you think that he will have enough room that he can have both his feet on there?

We began using the risk assessment/safety checklists as a way to prevent secondary injuries among farmers w/ disabilities. We recognize that farmers w/ disabilities are at increased risk and it is our responsibility to eliminate or decrease that risk as much as possible.

**Announcer:** To that end, Tracy and staff are refining these safety checklists - forms based on prior work of an Iowa State University student.

**Tracy Keninger:** We heard about Dani Hite's work through Steve Freeman at ISU. And he introduced us to her so we could work collaboratively on this risk assessment safety checklist.

**Announcer:** AgrAbility Workshop that Dani gave a presentation about her graduate study. As a land-grant university student, she worked on early versions of the safety checklist.

**Dani Hite, Iowa State University:** The checklist contained general safety questions/safety issues regarding the equipment. And so when the equipment is being built for a farmer or individual with a disability, they can go to these

questions and identify safety issues. And if there is a problem they can fix it so they can minimize the risk of secondary injuries.

**Announcer:** Students from other land-grant institutions are also conducting research beneficial to AgrAbility clientele. At South Dakota State University, Agriculture Engineering majors are designing hand and foot controls for utility vehicles. In a unique partnership with Koyker Manufacturing, students are discovering ways to make “The Raptor” more user-friendly for disabled farm workers.

And at the University of Nebraska, Tim Bray from has done work on an innovative wheel chair he’s labeled “The Transformer”. It allows the user to work standing up or in low, ground level positions.

**Tim Bray, University of Nebraska:** My angle was to have a wheel chair that allows me to go into an environment just like an able bodied person w/o adapting the equipment. In theory, you could then go into any environment, use any equipment w/ minimal adaptations and also able bodies people would still be able to use that equipment.

One thing that I can’t do with my chair is walk stairs, but give me a little bit of time and we’ll work on that one.

**Announcer:** Back in Iowa, Tracy leaves to join her AgrAbility partner at the annual Farm Progress Show. Easter Seals/Iowa and Iowa State University Extension work collaboratively through the AgrAbility Project to provide on-site services to farmers and farm family members with disabilities. It really is a team approach.

**Mary Yearns, Iowa State University:** I would say our strengths are that Iowa State has the ag background and ag expertise. I’m a housing specialist so I have a lot of background and information on universal design and home accessibility. .Our Easter Seals partner, of course, has lots of expertise on working with people with disabilities and rural rehabilitation.

**Announcer:** Here at the show, Mary gives interested farmers a tour of a display that offers ideas for easier home living.

**Mary Yearns:** It’s a designed trailer that has 2 bathroom exhibits inside it – one that demonstrates universal design features. In another words, planning

a home in advance so that it's going to work well for your entire lifetime. And then a second bathroom that demonstrates how you would make a roll-in shower for someone that uses a wheelchair. So two different ways to approach a bathroom.

I think it's been great to have these 2 different organizations that bring different strengths to the mix. I think it works well when we can both contribute our expertise to the program. We can really help families when we bring our expertise to the situation.

**Tracy Keninger:** When we work with a farm family member who's acquired a disability, we look at their entire life. It's not only about continuing to farm, but it's about being able to do everything as independent as possible.

It's always good for a person w/ a disability to be gainful, to earn an income, to pay taxes. And AgrAbility helps farmers do that. Instead of putting them on the social security rolls, we help them to be independent and to be gainfully employed.

When a farmer says that we've impacted their life, that's the greatest thing we can hear. So much of what I learned on the farm is who I am today. It's every bit of what I am about. It's incredibly gratifying work. There's no greater reward than seeing a farmer do what they love, and that's to farm.

**Announcer:** Approximately half of the farmers with disabilities assisted by AgrAbility were disabled through a non-agricultural work related injury or illness.

**Mary Dunn, Wisconsin Dairywoman:** I just like working w/ dairy cattle – brown Swiss in particular. There's right around 70 total head –that's young stock & steers – and then the barn holds 26 milk cows. All have names - Lollipop, Elizabeth, Buffy, Buffet, Bouquet, Derby.

**Announcer:** Mary Dunn has worked on this dairy farm her entire life. It hasn't been an easy road for her. In her early twenties, she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, a crippling disease that affects over 2 million Americans. Simple, everyday movements can be excruciating.

**Mary Dunn:** Getting up to do something would be like if you had the burner turned on the stove and every time you wanted to move you had to put your



finger on that hot burner. After a few times you probably wouldn't want to put your finger on that hot burner. So then that means you have to psyche yourself up to do it so you can move. So that's how I operate every day.

Hi, Paul!

**Announcer:** But Mary needed more than gutsy courage to continue farming. She heard about AgrAbility and soon met Paul Leverenz.

**Paul Leverenz, Easter Seals-Wisconsin:** We first met Mary a little over 10 years ago. You first have to incorporate that disability into who you are and how you're going to live your life and how you're going to do your work.

**Announcer:** For Mary, that meant a number of changes on the Dunndale Farm. She bought this ATV in order to move easily around the land. She was fitted with custom \$900 orthopedic shoes that allow her to walk, in spite of having her foot fused to her ankle - an operation that made one leg inches shorter than the other. And Wisconsin AgrAbility helped her with a number of other improvements.

**Mary Dunn:** We've added steps to the tractors. If your feet no longer have any ability to actually spring or lift you - so you've then got to somehow lift yourself some other way. And so by adding another step or two so it's not so steep. It just makes it a lot easier.

We've added a bulk bin to handle feed in bulk rather than lift individual 100 lbs bags or 50 lb bags and having to carry them. In a day if I feed the cows - that would be 400 lbs - that would be four bags that you would have to dump into a cart or a wheel barrow...and then take around the barn. Now you push the cart under the auger, it just runs into the cart.

We've added an Easy Track in the milking barn to hang the individual units on so you don't have to carry them from cow to cow.

**Announcer:** Mary is one of over a thousand farmers that Wisconsin AgrAbility has helped since it began in 1991. The program's success is due to a strong, inter-agency partnership.

**Paul Leverenz:** Vocational Rehabilitation is focused only on people with disabilities. Extension does everybody and tries to work with folks, and

Easter Seals brings the expertise of working with the individual with a disability. Together the three of us all have the common goal of trying to have farmers continue to farm.

When physically you start to lose the ability to do that work, you start to try to struggle with 'who am I as a person'. If I can't physically do as much work as I did before and I start to lose my physical capacity or ability to do that work activity, does that mean I'm less of a farmer, or less of a person?

**Mary Dunn:** If we're no longer productive, what other slot do we fit into society? Like for myself, if we were to go & pick up a 9-5 job, that's OK. But if you have a bad day and have to call in and say "I'm going to be 3 hrs late because it's going to take me that long before I really get that I'm functional – you're only going to do that once or twice and you won't have a job.

**Paul Leverenz:** Mary's a wonderful example. 10 years later - when people told her she should quit –she's still here farming.

**Mary Dunn:** Well. I hope I can continue. Actually 9 yrs ago when I started with AgrAbility we were hoping for 5 more years. And so we've done the 5 yrs. And we've gone 4 years beyond. And maybe we can do another 5 years.

**Announcer:** AgrAbility has provided over 10,000 farm assessments for farmers and ranchers with disabilities since it was established in 1991.

**Carla Wilhite, Oklahoma State University:** I have to say the farmers that I meet in Oklahoma are pretty amazing. I guess they have a western orientation to farming towards living life. The spaces are huge. The machinery is large. They are very independent minded people.

**Announcer:** Carla Wilhite is an occupational therapist for Oklahoma AgrAbility. But she also brings her physical therapy skills to the job.

**Carla Wilhite:** The first thing that I wanted to emphasize to Gene –how important it is to do some stretching when you're getting ready to do some work. We view the human being very holistically. Not just in terms of the movements they make, but the meaning of doing things. So our way of exercising a person would be to do something that in the context of their real life.

**Announcer:** This is not the first time Carla has helped Gene Mikles. He suffered a severe stroke two years ago. Recently, he took a fall and fractured his hip. Both times Gene started his initial rehabilitation at the local hospital with therapist, Jerry Spitz.

**Jerry Spitz, Great Plains Regional Medical Center:** What I try to do is simulate here in our department as close as I possibly could that same type of setup as he has with his tractor. Gene worked on that several times. We had to be able to do it here and accomplish it here with a fair amount of accuracy before we ever went out to the tractor.

Carla came in the facility one day and gave us a brochure on the new AgrAbility program. The first thing I did was call Gene so that's how it kinda' got started.

**Announcer:** Oklahoma AgrAbility is relatively new, having started in the year 2000.

**Carla Wilhite:** Go hard. Excellent!

**Announcer:** Like in other states, the program relies on the power of strong partnerships.

**Carla Wilhite:** We have made excellent progress in the short time we've been going. We have Langston University-small farm outreach program. We have Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension. ABLE-Tech which is the state's assisted technology project. And our nonprofit partner is the Oklahoma Assisted Technology Foundation.

**Announcer:** And based on Carla's assessment of Gene Mikles' situation, the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services decided to purchase him a tractor lift.

**Gene Mikles, Oklahoma Rancher:** Oh, that's been great....because you don't have to struggle getting up on the steps in getting up in the tractor. I guess I've taken a new aspect on life since I've had my stroke because things can get done maybe tomorrow-It used to-I had to do it all right now.

**Carla Wilhite:** I have to say that I'm quite pleased on the progress that he's making in his rehabilitation. I have the best occupational therapist job in OK if not anywhere. I am working with farmers who – they're almost like ready-made- motivated to do anything that they need to do to get back to work.

**Announcer:** The dedicated partners of AgrAbility are helping farmers achieve their goals across the country. From Oklahoma to Wisconsin. From Kentucky to Iowa - and in twenty-six other states. It is a CSREES program that improves lives, helps communities prosper, and makes for a stronger rural America.

On the next episode, Partners travels to the Pacific and reports on the exciting work of land-grant institutions of this vast region. Learn how Extension is reviving traditional fishing among youth on Guam. Travel to Pohnpei where new oyster farms produce highly-prized black pearls - helping to revive the local economy. And see how University of Hawaii researchers tackle problems facing the natural resources of the Pacific region. All this & more, the next time on Partners.

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### **Partners #11/AgrAbility Kentucky Short Script**

**Announcer:** Alan Hicks had been working as an office manager at this small town car dealership for decades. He made a good living at it. Then something went terribly wrong.

**Allen Hicks, Kentucky Farmer:** I work here at the dealership, but also run a farm. My baler had been acting up. I climbed up on top of it. I leaned down to look and I can't remember after that if I slipped or lost my balance.

**Announcer:** After falling, Allen's hands became caught in the moving belts of the machine. His son found him one hour later – still in the hay baler's grip.

**Allen Hicks:** I had accepted that I lost my hands. I was just begging to live and felt lucky to live so it didn't really bother me. I don't know why.

**Announcer:** In spite of having both hands amputated, Allen returned to his office job, just 6 days after his devastating accident. But he still faced a challenge at his farm.

**Allen Hicks:** I've always have been independent, and if I wanted to do something, I did it. Now, there are things that I have to have people help me to do. With planning, I'd figured I could do it. And with people's help, I've been able to do it.

**Announcer:** One of those that helped was John Hancock. John works for the University of Kentucky's AgrAbility program, serving disabled farmers throughout the state.

**John Hancock, University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension:** I enjoy it. You meet some lifelong friends. Like me and Allen have become real good friends and have a lot of things in common. Once I heard about what happened and what the result was, I really didn't want to come down here. How do you help somebody that lost both hands?

**Announcer:** John knew what Allen Hicks needed, and went to work. He helped Allen with machinery solutions to ease the work load. But he also helped with the mental aspects of being disabled. John has spent 20 years wheel chair-bound, due to a motorcycle accident, and was key to Allen's recovery.

**Allen Hicks:** It just sort of amazed me that he was doing this program being in the condition that he was. He's trying to help people so that inspired me.

**Announcer:** John still offers Allen solutions – from easy hydraulic hose hook-ups to mechanized hay wagon hitching. But Kentucky AgrAbility has other agency support. Cardinal Hill Rehabilitation Hospital is a major player as is the state's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Ivy Alexander, who works for the OVR, has helped Allen make his office more user-friendly. Still, Allen's biggest passion is for the farm. And with AgrAbility's help, he's now looking to the future. John Hancock...

**John Hancock:** I'd say 10 years from now he'll be farming 3 times as much as he is now because he likes it so much & he's successful. And he'll probably still be at the dealership.

## **Partners #11/AgrAbility Iowa Short Script.**

**Tracy Keninger, Easter Seals-Iowa:** My dad acquired a disability when I was very young and soon learned the impact a disability has on a farm family. As a small child I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was motivated to really give back.

**Announcer:** Tracy Keninger has given back. She now serves as director of one of the first AgrAbility programs in America.

**Tracy Keninger:** Our expertise at Easter Seals/Iowa is truly the on-site farm assessment and looking at the agricultural components of continuing to be gainful after acquiring a disability.

**Announcer:** Some of assessment happens back at the office where the staff uses CAD computer drawings for equipment design changes. They are also developing risk assessment check lists based on work of land-grant university student, Dani Hite.

**Dani Hite, Iowa State University:** The checklist contained general safety questions/safety issues regarding the equipment. And so when the equipment is being built for a farmer or individual with a disability, they can go to these questions and identify safety issues.

**Announcer:** Collaboration defines what Iowa AgrAbility is all about.

**Tracy Keninger:** Easter Seals/Iowa and Iowa State University Extension work collaboratively through the AgrAbility Project to provide on-site services to farmers and farm family members with disabilities. It really is a team approach.

**Mary Yearn, Iowa State University:** I would say our strengths are that Iowa State has the ag background and ag expertise. I'm a housing specialist so I have a lot of background and information on universal design and home accessibility.

**Announcer:** Here at the annual Farm Progress Show, Mary gives interested farmers a tour of a display, offering ideas for easier home living.

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**Mary Dunn:** Getting up to do something would be like if you had the burner turned on the stove and every time you wanted to move you had to put your finger on that hot burner. After a few times you probably wouldn't want to put your finger on that hot burner. So then that means you have to psyche yourself up to do it so you can move. So that's how I operate every day.

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### **Partners #12/Pacific Land Grants :30 Promo**

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