Relevance

Agriculture work is considered one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States, with an estimated 50,000 disabled farmers and ranchers in Texas. Disabling conditions such as arthritis, amputation, back injuries, heart conditions, traumatic brain injury, and others impact a producer’s ability to perform many of the day-to-day tasks necessary to their operations. These disabilities are often the result of a dangerous work environment where workers often toil in conditions that contribute to or increase the risk of health problems. For example, risks associated with farm equipment operation, handling of livestock, exposure to excessive vibration and motions, potential for increased falls, respiratory hazards, and exposure to extreme temperatures contribute to the overall risk for farmers, ranchers, employees, and family members. There is evidence to suggest that some disabling conditions may increase the risk for secondary injury if preventative steps are not taken. It is estimated that each year, a disabling injury related to work in agriculture occurs on one in every 117 farms. Physical disabilities not related to agriculture increase the rate to one disabling injury for every 24 Texas farms.

Response

The Texas AgrAbility ACE program goal is to connect, assist, and empower agricultural producers, their family members, and employees with disabilities and chronic health conditions to stay engaged in production agriculture. The project does so by:

- Assisting service providers to better understand the unique needs of the agricultural producers as it relates to acquired disabilities and chronic illnesses through training and technical assistance.
- Connecting individuals with a disability to resources specific to their individual needs and to their type of agriculture operation.
- Empowering those who need our services to better navigate the many systems for acquiring disability services and resources, such as assistive technology, to help them in their efforts to remain in production agriculture.

The Texas AgrAbility Project assists individuals to overcome barriers that might otherwise impair their ability to remain in production agriculture by providing:

- Education to individuals with disabilities and their families engaged in production agriculture, as well as service providers who work with them, to increase knowledge about accommodating disabilities, improving function, and avoiding secondary injuries.
- Consultative assistance such as individualized farm and ranch assessment, home environment assessment, financial business analysis, and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses to increase the likelihood that these agriculture producers will remain in production agriculture.
• Networking and marketing of the Texas AgrAbility Project to build the capacity to deliver services through the development of networking and marketing activities to disseminate information, identify clients, and foster linkages to disability and health resources within the broader disability stakeholder community.

Results
The Texas AgrAbility Project is in its fourth year of a four-year grant project cycle and has numerous achievements to date, including:

• Ongoing formal contract and reciprocal formal referral process with the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to provide their consumers with AgrAbility services to assist them in remaining in agriculture.

• Provided information and training to over 1,531 professionals including DARS counselors, DARS area managers, DARS regional directors, medical personnel in the field of occupational therapy, and veterans with and without disability.

• Attended eight events as an exhibitor to provide agriculture producers, agriculture educators, medical professionals, agency service providers, veterans, and the general public with educational materials on the impacts of disability and agriculture.

• Provided ongoing AgrAbility services to 65 clients; referred 15 AgrAbility clients to the DARS service agency; and assisted 10 individuals referred to AgrAbility from DARS.

• Provided educational information face-to-face to over 4,821 individuals, which equated to 3,332 direct educational contact hours.

• Developed a collaborative planning team for agriculture workshops for veterans with and without disabilities, which includes Extension agents, USDA personnel, Texas Department of Agriculture personnel, FSA personnel, Centers for Independent Living personnel, DARS personnel, and Texas Veteran’s Commission personnel.

• Developed and distributed over 250 Beginning Agriculture Producer manuals to veterans interested in pursuing businesses in the agriculture field.

• Hosted three Agriculture Workshops for Veterans with and without disabilities.

• The online “Disability and Agriculture” course was accessed by 340 individuals.

• The AgrAbility website has received a total of 84,086 visitors, with an average of 66 visitors per day.

The Texas AgrAbility Project is helping to keep agricultural producers in the field and in the driver’s seat of their operations.