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A newsletter dedicated to friends of the Indiana AgrAbility Project/Breaking New Ground Outreach Program

TAP-ing into a new agricultural career

Retiring soldier with a passion for farming finds a bridge through the Army Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

AgrAbility is accustomed to having interns, such as occupational therapy students, but recently the program had its first active-duty military member as an intern – and a colonel at that.

Joe Ricker began his military career in 1992 as an Army Reservist and moved to full-time Active Guard Reserve in 1997. As he recently began approaching mandatory retirement, the prospect of a career

change loomed. There were multiple options, but the question remained: where was his passion? Joe decided it was in agriculture.

He took the plunge and purchased a house and some land in Indiana, but he had few farming skills. To improve his agricultural know-how, Joe attended some AgrAbility workshops where he met Cindy Chastain, AgrAbility's veteran outreach coordinator at the time.

Joe eventually worked with Cindy and a representative from the Department of Defense SkillBridge program to establish Joe's AgrAbility internship during his last six months of active duty. SkillBridge, part of the TAP initiative, can help service members bridge the gap between the end of military service and the beginning of their civilian careers.

Joe's internship experience was so successful that he has continued to help AgrAbility conduct veteran outreach, in Indiana and nationally, after Chastain retired from AgrAbility service in July 2022.



Joe Ricker, with his wife, Annette, in the background, at the Indiana War Memorial for his promotion to colonel



Joe and his son Grant harvesting honey

An avid beekeeper, Joe is helping to lead a beekeeping community of interest, with a focus on assistive technology, for the National AgrAbility Project. He also collaborates closely with the Indiana Chapter of the Farmer Veteran Coalition.

Joe says "AgrAbility is an unbelievable resource for veterans to start a career in farming or wanting to experience farming. I am humbled by the opportunity that AgrAbility gives me to help veterans get to their next mission."

Travel stipends coming for National Training Workshop in Spokane, WA



After an absence of two years because of pandemic restrictions, the in-person AgrAbility National Training Workshop (NTW) returned in Madison, Wisconsin, last March. Nearly 200 participants gathered for four days of education, networking, tours, and renewal. The attendees were clearly thrilled to be back together after such a long time apart.

Next year, the NTW is scheduled for March 20-23 at the Centennial Hotel in Spokane, Washington, and farmers with disabilities may apply for travel stipends to attend. These funds normally cover such costs as approved travel expenses, registration fees, and hotel accommodations. It is anticipated that stipend applications will be available in October.

An Indiana AgrAbility client, Laurie Hayn of Plymouth, is scheduled to be the keynote speaker and share how she has continued farming after a combine entanglement in 2018.

A limited number of travel stipends will also be available for Purdue Extension educators to attend the NTW.

Visit www.agrability.org/ntw for more information.



The NTW offers many opportunities to learn new things, network with peers and professionals, and try out assistive technologies

Out & About with AgrAbility

EDUCATION & AWARENESS PAST & FUTURE



Outreach Coordinator Ed Sheldon joined the Indiana Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation for a workshop on accessible gardening at Flanner Farms in downtown Indianapolis on August 30. The farm, sponsored by Flanner House, provides two acres of community-based agricultural production space in the heart of an urban food desert.

Some upcoming events for Indiana AgrAbility include:

- National FFA Convention, Indianapolis, IN, October 26-29
- Connecting with Amish and Other Plain Communities Conference, Shipshewana, IN, November 1-3
- Indiana Farm Equipment and Technology Expo, Westfield, IN, December 13-15
- Fort Wayne Farm Show, Fort Wayne, IN, January 17-19
- National Farm Machinery Show, Louisville, KY, February 15-18
- AgrAbility National Training Workshop, Spokane, WA, March 20-23

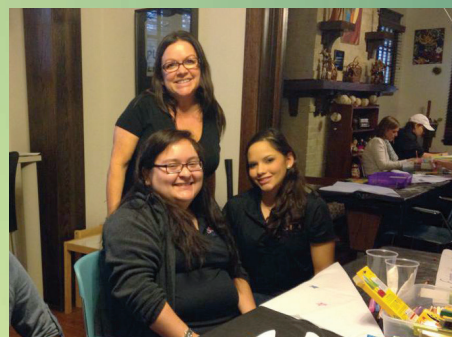
Reaching beyond physical disabilities

Over the years, AgrAbility has evolved from a program that focused almost exclusively on physical disabilities to one that recognizes and addresses needs that are less visible. Some of those issues include farm stress and mental/behavioral health.

There has been significant effort in recent years to reduce the stigma associated with mental/behavioral health issues and to provide resources for addressing them. AgrAbility has responded by participating in such efforts as USDA's Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), and is a partner on the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center.

Indiana AgrAbility has been involved with providing Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) sessions for several years. Latino Outreach Coordinator Kimber Nicoletti-Martínez was recently certified as a MHFA instructor and has been working to provide stress-related support to Spanish-speaking farmworkers.

The Purdue Extension Farm Stress Team is composed of educators from the realms of health/human sciences and agriculture/natural resources. According to their web page, extension.purdue.edu/farmstress, "This team provides tools, resources, and programs to help farmers address the



Kimber Nicoletti-Martínez, top, has led workshops on a wide variety of topics

day-to-day stresses and difficulties of owning or operating a business which is subject to so many challenges and uncertainties." Two of the signature educational programs they present are titled "Communicating with Farmers under Stress" and "Weathering the Storm in Agriculture: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset."

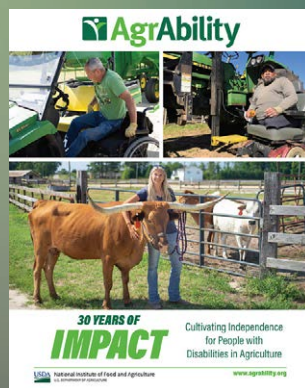
A new resource to assist with mental health issues is the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**, which was launched nationwide in July in English and Spanish. Those who call (or text) 988 are connected with counselors who are trained to deal with people in suicidal or emotional distress.

While Indiana AgrAbility does not provide a crisis intervention line, callers are always welcome to call 800-825-4264 for information and referral.

AgrAbility: 30 Years of Impact

National AgrAbility recently released *AgrAbility: 30 Years of Impact*. Among the highlights are a timeline of the program's history, descriptions and statistics related to AgrAbility's major initiatives, and 13 client stories (many with video links) that illustrate the ways AgrAbility can improve quality of life and cultivate independence for people with disabilities in agriculture.

You can download a PDF copy of the publication and access a screen-reader friendly version at www.agrability.org/impact.



Assistive technology loan library from Easterseals Crossroads

Indiana AgrAbility partner Easterseals Crossroads also holds the grant for Indiana's Assistive Technology (AT) Act Program, INDATA. As part of its services, INDATA maintains a device loan library, currently housing more than 2,500 items. All device loans are for 30 days, and you can browse available devices and complete an AT loan application at www.eastersealstech.com/device_loan_library.

The wide range of devices include aids for reading, computer access, mobility, vehicle use, and even adaptive musical instruments and games.

Easterseals Crossroads and Purdue University staff members are also working to establish a satellite loan library in Purdue's Depart-



A multitude of accessible electronic devices, and other AT, are available for loan



Brian Norton, director of technology services at Easterseals Crossroads, showcases loan library AT devices

ment of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, home to AgrAbility.

In addition to the library, INDATA has a reuse program that can provide computers and some other devices at no charge to individuals with disabilities who live in Indiana and have no other means of obtaining them. It also offers low-interest, extended-term financial loan for purchasing assistive technology devices such as hearing aids, augmentative communication devices, accessible vehicles, and home modifications. See agrability.info/ATfunding to see if you're qualified to apply.

Thank you, Cindy Chastain

The National AgrAbility Project and Indiana AgrAbility are very grateful to Cindy Chastain for her years of service as veteran outreach coordinator.

A veteran of more than 30 years as an Army officer, Cindy joined AgrAbility in 2014 and revolutionized the program's services to veterans. She provided direct services to veterans in need, established strong relationships with organizations like the Farmer Veteran Coalition, and even provided testimony before the U.S. House Agriculture Committee concerning veterans in agriculture.

Cindy is also a farmer and looks forward to spending more time with her husband, dogs, chickens, and other critters.



Cindy Chastain

TOOLBOX Spotlight

TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE EASIER



The Walk-Behind Tractor

— also called a two-wheeled or walking tractor — allows the user to perform a multitude of tasks in small areas without digging or lifting. It accommodates over 20 different attachments and is popular in high tunnel hoop houses, where farm size is small, and/or where the terrain steep and rugged. It can go where four-wheel compact tractors can't. Most makes/models come with: reversible handlebars giving it front or rear PTO, independently engaged PTO, multi-speed forward and reverse, steering brakes, lockable wheel differential, and easy-interchange implement system.

For more information on this and more helpful tools, visit

THE TOOLBOX
Assistive Technology Database
www.agrability.org/toolbox