



A lifetime in Agriculture

Indiana farmer leaves legacy for generations to come

Dick Welch was born into a farm family in Carroll County Indiana and spent his working life in agriculture, and he recently passed away on his family farm near Buck Creek.

After growing up on a farm and earning a B.S. in agriculture from McPherson College and an M.S. in agricultural economics from Purdue, Dick and his wife, Joy, spent two years working on agriculture-related projects in Bolivia with Heifer Project. He returned to the U.S. in 1970 to resume farming with his brother.

A longtime friend of Indiana AgrAbility Project Director Bill Field, Dick came to benefit from AgrAbility's services after a July 2016 head-on collision left him with significant mobility problems. His left knee was severely dislocated in the accident, and Dick had to progress from using a walker, to a cane, to a knee brace.

Determined and resourceful, he and family members also fabricated a device that allowed his left leg, which had limited capacity to bend, to ride outside his utility vehicle so he could scout his fields and get around the farmstead.

Dick was also determined to run his combine during the harvest of

2016, just a few months after his injury and while still battling infections and loss of stamina. With much help from others, he was able to access the cab of his combine, where he spent about 12 hours in the seat each day of the harvest.

In 2017, he was able to secure and install a used lift, thus making his access to the combine easier and safer, and he also added extra steps to his tractors to improve accessibility. In addition, Dick's left knee was replaced in summer 2017.

In addition to working his land, Dick also assisted AgrAbility by allowing the implementation of new remote monitoring technologies in his grain storage facilities. His willingness to participate contributed to the advancement of agricultural safety and to improvements in remote monitoring.

Last fall, when interviewed for this article, Dick was looking forward to harvesting his 1500 acres of corn and soybeans, which he and his family accomplished. However, in January 2018 after experiencing flu-like symptoms,



Dick Welch on his combine lift

Dick was informed that he had untreatable pancreatic cancer. He passed away two weeks later.

Dick Welch leaves behind a strong legacy as a farmer and community servant, including the passing of his farm to his daughter and son-in-law. He is missed by not only his natural family, but also his "extended family," which includes AgrAbility.

Striving to provide good stewardship of resources

What is AgrAbility's real impact?

In a recent study, an AgrAbility client group showed: (1) increased quality of life (QOL) levels of 28%, while a no-treatment comparison group's QOL level fell by 4%; and (2) increased independent living and working (ILW) levels of 29%, while the no-treatment comparison group increased only 8%.

Measurable impact is important to just about any program. For AgrAbility, staff members want to know if their efforts are worthwhile; clients want to be assured that they're getting valuable services; and funding agencies want to ensure that their dollars are being used wisely.

With this in mind, AgrAbility recently produced *AgrAbility: A USDA Program with Demonstrated Impact*. Featured is a recent study that indicates a significant increase in quality of life and independent living and working levels for AgrAbility clients as compared to farmers with disabilities who had not received AgrAbility services. A PDF is downloadable at tinyurl.com/agrability-impact.

Showing impact is especially important this year as Congress prepares to reauthorize the Farm Bill and considers whether or not AgrAbility will continue to be included in it. Funding for AgrAbility was cut from President Trump's budget for 2018 and 2019, but it was added back by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for 2018, and hopefully will be for 2019 as well.



AgrAbility

A USDA Program with Demonstrated Impact



The vision of AgrAbility is to enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities, so that they, their families, and their communities continue to succeed in rural America.

"Disability" covers a wide spectrum. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Injuries: spinal cord injuries, amputations, back problems
- Debilitating diseases: arthritis, multiple sclerosis, diabetes
- Conditions of aging: vision loss, hearing impairments, reduced mobility
- Veterans' issues: PTSD, traumatic brain injury, other combat-related impairments

AgrAbility provides education, on-site assistance, and networking services to help agricultural workers with disabilities get the technologies and services they need to succeed.

Funding is currently available for on-site AgrAbility projects across the country plus our National AgrAbility Project, which supports the state projects and provides limited assistance to those in need of services who live in non-AgrAbility states.



Out & About with AgrAbility

EDUCATION & AWARENESS PAST & FUTURE



Indiana was well-represented at the 2018 AgrAbility National Training Workshop held March 19-22 in Portland, Maine. Nine AgrAbility staff members, one intern, and around 15 Indiana farmers and students made the trip to participate in a great conference. Above, Steve Swain, Indiana AgrAbility's rural rehabilitation specialist, leads a session on farmers and aging.

Some upcoming Indiana events:

- Purdue Master Gardener State Conference, Hendricks County 4-H Fairgrounds, Danville, June 7-9
- Indiana FFA Convention, Purdue University, June 18-21
- Indiana Rural Health Annual Conference, French Lick, June 26-27
- Old Fashion Farming Days, Shipshewana, July 27-28
- Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis, August 3-19 (look for AgrAbility in the FFA Pavilion)

INDIANA HAS NEARLY 500,000 MILITARY VETERANS, AND MANY OF THEM COULD BENEFIT FROM INVOLVEMENT IN AGRICULTURE

Indiana chapter of Farmer Veteran Coalition launched



Veterans joined together at Blue Yonder Organic Farm to launch FVC's Indiana chapter

On November 11, Veterans Day, Indiana AgrAbility staff members and Sara Creech, farmer veteran, hosted the inaugural meeting of the Farmer Veteran Coalition (FVC) of Indiana. Approximately 42 veterans and their families gathered at Sara's Blue Yonder Organic Farm in North Salem for the kickoff. Michael O'Gorman, executive director of the Farmer Veteran Coalition, Cindy Chastain, AgrAbility's veteran outreach coordinator, and Dr. Kevin Gibson of Purdue University joined Sara in officially signing the chapter charter.

With nearly 500,000 Veterans in Indiana alone, many of whom have served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and/or Operation Enduring Freedom, the number of veterans with disabilities is rapidly increasing. Research has shown that working the land and caring for animals helps to reduce stress, improve self-esteem, and encourage social interaction.

A key step for the chapter is to form an advisory board that will develop a strategic plan and engage in fundraising to support chapter

activities, such as the mushroom growing workshop that was held April 7th in North Salem, IN. Other upcoming activities include networking "meet and greet" events throughout the year, mentoring opportunities, and possibly a farm finance workshop in the near future.

To get involved with FVC Indiana, email infarmerveterans@gmail.com or Cindy Chastain at chastai1@purdue.edu Also check out the organization's Facebook page [@FVCINDIANA](https://www.facebook.com/FVCINDIANA).



Michael O'Gorman reads proclamation establishing Indiana FVC chapter as Sara Creech looks on

Etheridge continues to support AgrAbility clients

"Retired" VR counselor serves as AgrAbility consultant

For more than 20 years, Steve Etheridge served as an Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation counselor with a caseload that included AgrAbility clients. Today, he continues to assist AgrAbility with VR-related issues.

Steve managed a general case load in rural northeast Indiana with a specialty in traumatic brain injury (TBI). For more than 10 years, he has been a member of the Indiana AgrAbility advisory team.

As the AgrAbility VR consultant, Steve serves as a resource for

AgrAbility staff members and clients who need guidance with VR-related issues.

If you have any questions about vocational rehabilitation issues, contact agrability@agrability.org. If our campus staff can't answer your question, it's likely that Steve can.



Steve Etheridge

AgrAbility makes visits to non-traditional agriculture operations

There are opportunities in agriculture for people with disabilities who aren't traditional farmers. AgrAbility staff members recently visited two facilities in northern Indiana that provide agricultural work opportunities to non-traditional growers.

Goldenrod, based in Goshen, provides a wide spectrum of services to people with disabilities. At their site in Middlebury, the staff is hoping to reopen a greenhouse that has been unused for several years. AgrAbility provided several suggestions to make the facility more accessible to Goldenrod clients who would be raising vegetables to be distributed through a community supported agriculture (CSA) system. Goldenrod also plans outdoor plots, and AgrAbility was able to share information about accessible pathways.

Green Bridge Growers in Mishawaka was started by Chris Tidmarsh, who has autism, and his mother, Jan Pilarski. After graduating from college, Chris had difficulty functioning effectively in traditional work environments, so he and his family explored agricultural options, resulting in the founding of Green Bridge Growers as a nonprofit organization. They plan to employ others with autism and sell their produce to local restaurants and through other venues.



Steve Swain (right) discusses options with Goldenrod staff

TOOLBOX Spotlight

TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE EASIER



The Strong-Arm Lift is designed, with its multiple attachments, to allow one to pick up (or load) then deposit into a UTV cargo bed all types of items (e.g., rocks, debris, hay, logs, feed/fertilizer/seed bags, game animals), often without having to leave the driver's seat. The device, which bolts on to the vehicle's frame on the driver's side, is operated by an independent hydraulic system with a 250-pound lift/dump capacity that runs off the vehicle's 12-volt battery. The lift tucks against the bed or can be removed when not in use.

For more information on this and many more helpful technologies, visit **THE TOOLBOX** Assistive Technology Database at www.agrability.org/toolbox