



## From Injury to 3,400 Acres

Indiana farmer models determination in overcoming barriers

Justin Hosler was only 20 years old when an automobile collision robbed him of his ability to walk. At the time, his family operated a 1,600-acre grain farm and a residential construction business, and Justin was studying architecture, partly to enhance his involvement in the family construction enterprise.

While a spinal cord injury might cause some to despair of pursuing ambitious goals, Justin isn't such a person. Though challenges have been common, he has not only maintained but expanded his horizons.

Not long after his injury, Justin began working with Indiana AgrAbility's Breaking New Ground Outreach Program. He clearly needed assistive technology in the form of a mechanical lift to safely continue farming, since others had physically lifted him into the tractor cab that first spring after his injury. With the recommendation from AgrAbility and assistance from Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR), he acquired a lift for one tractor.

However, that was only the beginning for Justin's involvement with AgrAbility and VR. As his needs have changed and farming operation has expanded, these partners have worked together



Justin enters one of his tractors during harvest last fall

to make sure Justin has the equipment he requires. Examples include: a pickup-mounted lift to reach multiple pieces of equipment; hand controls for a grain-hauling semi-truck; a heavy-duty tracked stand-up wheelchair; ramps for accessing his grain handling facilities; and even a tower-type grain drier that allows Justin to access its controls remotely.

Today, Justin and his team farm 1,800 of their own acres and custom-farm another 1,600 acres. He also completed his architecture degree and worked in that field until the farming operation demanded his full attention.

Justin's story shows how even daunting obstacles can be overcome with determination and assistance from others.

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH AGRABILITY

## National Training Workshops: Virtual and In-person

MORE INFORMATION AT [www.agrability.org](http://www.agrability.org)



**Virtual National  
Training Workshop:**  
six webinars in three  
days

**AgrAbility National  
Training Workshop:**  
four days of break-  
out sessions, tours,  
special speakers, and  
networking

Two AgrAbility National Training Workshops are on the way – one that requires some travel, and one that comes to you.

On February 21-23, the AgrAbility Virtual National Training Workshop will bring six webinars to your Internet-enabled computer. Scheduled topics include hand health in agriculture, the benefits of working with FSA, and initiatives for farmer veterans. See [www.agrability.org/online-training/virtualntw](http://www.agrability.org/online-training/virtualntw) for more information.

Then on March 20-23, the annual AgrAbility National Training Workshop (NTW), convenes in Knoxville, Tennessee, for four days of plenary sessions, breakouts, tours, networking, and special events. The NTW is the premier training event addressing issues of disability in agriculture, attracting farmers and other professionals from all over the country. This year's conference headquarters is the Holiday Inn World's Fair Park located in downtown Knoxville.

A limited number of travel stipends are usually available for farmers with disabilities. Check [www.agrability.org/ntw](http://www.agrability.org/ntw) for more information or contact Chuck Baldwin [baldwi19@purdue.edu](mailto:baldwi19@purdue.edu).

# Out & About with AgrAbility

## EDUCATION & AWARENESS PAST & FUTURE



Indiana AgrAbility farmers Sara Creech and Ed Bell shared their experiences during a panel discussion at the AgrAbility 25th Anniversary Celebration. The event was held on July 12<sup>th</sup> in Arlington, Virginia, in conjunction with the RESNA Annual Conference. Sara is a military veteran and proprietor of Blue Yonder Organic Farm in North Salem, IN. Ed operates Bell's Strawberry Farm in Hagerstown, IN.

Some upcoming events:

- National Farm Machinery Show, Louisville, February 15-17
- AgrAbility Virtual National Training Workshop. [www.agrability.org/online-training/virtualntw](http://www.agrability.org/online-training/virtualntw), February 21-23
- Indiana Small Farms Conference, Hendricks County Fairgrounds, Danville, March 2-4
- AgrAbility National Training Workshop, Knoxville, TN, March 20-23

STAFF FROM THE NATIONAL AND INDIANA AGRABILITY PROJECTS HAD SOME UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE MISSION OF AGRABILITY WITH ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS DURING 2016

## Educating our legislators

AgrAbility functions through a USDA grant program, so government officials who make decisions that affect AgrAbility and its clientele need to stay informed about the project.

The National AgrAbility Project (NAP) sponsored a 25th anniversary celebration last summer in Washington, D.C., to commemorate the program's history from its inception in 1991 to the present. As part of that event, the NAP in-



Representative Rodney Davis

visited several government officials, including Representative Rodney Davis from Illinois who showed significant knowledge of and interest in AgrAbility during an earlier House Agriculture Committee hearing on veterans in agriculture. Representative Davis spoke, as did Lannon Baccam, the USDA's liaison to military veterans. Also making comments at the celebration was Maria Town, President Obama's disability specialist.

During the same visit to Washington, staff members were also able to meet with Indiana Senator Joe Donnelly during a reception at his office. The senator was familiar with AgrAbility and had met the project's



AgrAbility visits with Senator Donnelly

veteran outreach coordinator while she was stationed in Afghanistan.

In addition, this fall Indiana Representative Larry Bucshon, requested a visit with AgrAbility staff member Linda Tarr to learn more about Indiana AgrAbility. They met with client Charles Kinney and his wife Patty who operate a grain farm in Richland, Indiana. Charles was injured on the farm, and AgrAbility helped him get the needed assistive technology to keep farming.

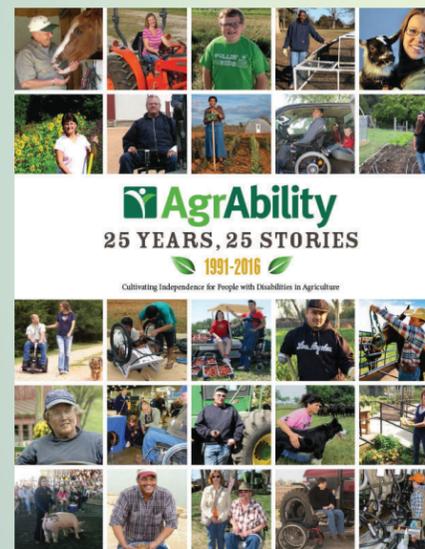


Representative Bucshon on farm visit

Consider how you might also educate your legislators about AgrAbility and other government supported programs you value.

# AgrAbility 1991–2016: 25 Years, 25 Stories

## Publication highlights 25 success stories



To help celebrate AgrAbility's 25th anniversary, the National AgrAbility Project prepared the publication *AgrAbility 1991-2016: 25 Years, 25 Stories*. This booklet includes success stories of AgrAbility clients and related programs, plus descriptions of AgrAbility's mission and services. It was designed to raise awareness of AgrAbility among clientele and key stakeholders, including legislators, VR counselors, and other professionals in agriculture and rehabilitation.

It is available in screen-reader accessible PDF at [www.agrability.org/25years](http://www.agrability.org/25years) where you'll also find all the individual stories, many with accompanying videos. You may request a print copy by emailing [agrability@agrability.org](mailto:agrability@agrability.org).

## Paoli FFA designs and constructs accessible zero-turn mower

Meeting practical needs is what the Bridging Horizons Community Service Contest is all about. Paoli FFA's efforts not only won the 2015-16 contest but restored joy and productivity to someone in their town.

A community member had been battling arthritis for many years. As a result, she was no longer able to mow her lawn – something not only of practical importance but also a source of joy to her. When the FFA advisor learned of the situation, he challenged his chapter to make a difference.

The students worked with the lady to determine her needs and limitations, which included the inability to lift her feet more than about five inches off the ground. After evaluating multiple possible solutions, the students devised a set of steps that attached to the mower, but were also removable, and which included handrails and a mechanism for raising and lowering the steps.

The result was not only a functional piece of technology but also renewed sense of joy from a seemingly common task.



# TOOLBOX Spotlight

## TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE EASIER



**Wheelchair Wheelblades** are essentially small skis that attach to the wheelchair's front caster wheels to improve the chair's mobility over snow and ice. The product has a wide contact surface that reportedly distributes the driver's pressure evenly and prevents the wheels from sinking into the snow or slush. The two tracking channels on the underside are designed to compress the snow to improve stability. The manufacturer indicates that Wheelblades are lightweight, shock- and friction-proof, attach/detach in seconds with little effort, and feature adjustable clamp locks that are designed to accommodate virtually all commonly used caster wheels.

For more information on this and other helpful technologies, visit **THE TOOLBOX** Assistive Technology Database at [www.agrability.org/toolbox](http://www.agrability.org/toolbox)