

Cuts through red tape

AgrAbility to aid disabled farmers

By Brad Haire
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Farmers with physical disabilities are often a little too self-reliant to ask for help or don't know where to find it. But help is out there, and a new program can link them to it.

AgrAbility in Georgia is a program designed to aid farmers who have physical injuries, disabilities or illnesses that hinder their work day.

It gets them back farming or makes it a little more comfortable for them, says Glen Rains, the program director and an engineer with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Partnership

The program is a partnership between the CAES and the Institute on Human Development and Disability in the UGA College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

"We'd like for farming to stay a vocation for people as much as possible," says Rains. "This program is one way of keeping farmers farming who don't want to be rehabilitated into another job. We want to help them do it."

The program is a service that links someone in Georgia to a chain of Cooperative Extension educators, disability experts, rural living professionals, and volunteers across the state and the country, Rains says.

Anyone who works or wants to work in agriculture and has a physical, cognitive or illness-related disability is eligible. This includes many things like amputations, arthritis, cancer, heart problems, diabetes or mental illness.

With loads of bureaucracy and red tape, finding help "can be a really drawn-out process for some," Rains says.

AgrAbility is geared to cut through the hassle, he adds.

Assess needs

Working through UGA Extension county offices, experts with AgrAbility identify clients or are contacted by them. The expert then visits the client and assesses the needs.

The process includes "explaining to the client all the resources that are

available and will work for their needs," Rains says.

AgrAbility is not set up to give direct payments to help farmers. But it can "hook them up with the right people who can," he says.

The Georgia program is in its second year of four funded by a \$150,000 annual grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service.

"We know that some farmers are

reluctant to ask for help, and getting them open to the idea of receiving it is a challenge," Rains says. "But this is paid for by their taxes. Everyone is pitching in."

Many referrals

The program has handled many referrals in Georgia, he says. It's directly helping six farmers, mostly in north Georgia.

But the program is expanding, he says.

A workshop called "Duct Tape, Velcro

and Beyond: Quick Solutions for Farm Families" was recently held in four locations across southern Georgia. It drew those with special needs and those who wanted to be trained in ways to turn simple materials into assistive technology, he says.

Similar AgrAbility programs are funded in 30 other states.

To find out more about the program, call (877) 524-6264, or go to www.agrabilityga.com or www.agrability.com.

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