

Focus on A Farmer

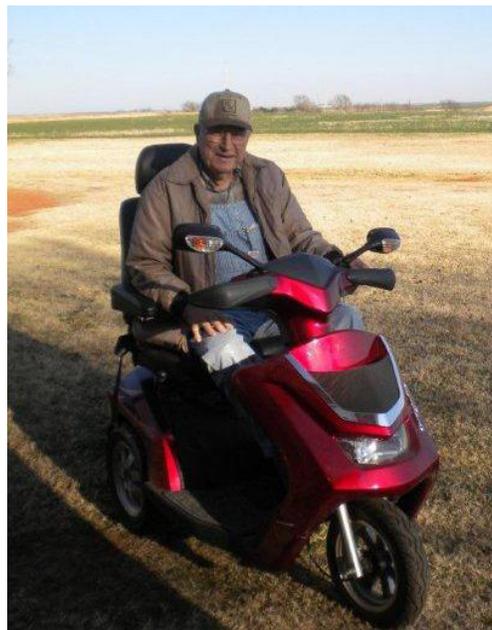
Wilbur Taylor

Wilbur Taylor has lived on the family farm his entire life and has personally farmed the same land for 70 years! Mr. Taylor remembers his father driving mules to work the soil and to complete farm tasks until he passed away and Wilbur, at the age of 10, assumed those responsibilities. He and his wife Imogene raised their three daughters there and now enjoy teaching their grandchildren about their heritage in agriculture and their farm where corn, wheat, and milo crops are now harvested.

Although Wilbur currently utilizes a tractor to complete farm tasks and haul hay, he began to experience mobility obstacles and barriers due to pain associated with rheumatoid arthritis, now located in all joints of his body. He also has pain in his lower back and pelvic area from an accident he sustained while operating a crane that overturned and crushed him. He has had two open heart surgeries and surgery on both arteries.



The Taylor Farm is an Oklahoma Historical Society, Certified Oklahoma Centennial Farm.



Wilbur utilizes his powered scooter to oversee his farm operation and to access his shop, granary and barn.

Having always been very active and loving the outdoors, Wilbur refused to give up when walking long distances became a challenge. He then contacted Oklahoma AgrAbility for assistance. “We didn’t have to discuss accommodations and assistive technology very long because he knew exactly what he needed,” said Sandra Stevenson, AgrAbility Case Manager. “From the very beginning, his top priority was to improve his mobility around the farm and to access his shed machine shop, granary and barn.”

Peggy Dunson-Bower, counselor with the Department of Rehabilitation Services, worked closely with Wilbur and authorized funding for the Royale 3 powered scooter that provides the opportunity for him to oversee his farm operation and to continue in his agricultural work.

Mr. Taylor reports he is quite pleased with the work Oklahoma AgrAbility and the Department of Rehabilitation Services contributed on his behalf. When asked to rate his quality of life since receiving AgrAbility services, Wilbur replied, “It’s improved immensely! Thank you Sandra and Peggy for making this happen.”

About Oklahoma AgrAbility

Oklahoma AgrAbility connects farmers and ranchers with disabilities to resources about ways to continue success in their enterprise, operation and daily life activities. Call AgrAbility at 888-885-5588 (voice/tty) or e-mail ability@okstate.edu for more information.



People of AgrAbility

Partner Corner: Linda Jaco



The veterans returning to the local community represent the very best our nation and state have to offer, yet too many struggle as they work to re-enter civilian society. This is especially true for those who return with a disability. Oklahoma AgrAbility recognizes the challenges created by this situation and has focused attention on an initiative to improve veteran's access to information about successful employment in agriculture production.

Oklahoma AgrAbility has participated for two consecutive years in the Oklahoma State University, Veterans with Disabilities Entrepreneurship Program (VEP), which offers cutting edge training in entrepreneurship and small business management to armed service individuals disabled as a result of their service. This experiential training has provided Oklahoma AgrAbility the opportunity to educate participants about agricultural employment ventures in farming/ranching with a disability. Participants learn about various assistive technologies such as tractor lifts, hearing and vision equipment and computer-related equipment, which can help them to overcome barriers associated with farming/ranching with a disability. Additionally, participants learn about a variety of state resources and funding mechanisms unique to disability and public/private benefits programs.

Networking is a valuable part of this program; not only the connections and bonding which develops among the vets, but the network of instructors they can relate to and get feedback from on an ongoing basis. All participants receive ten months of support and mentorship from entrepreneurship experts to help give them the confidence to deal with challenges and risks and create a successful venture.

Oklahoma AgrAbility wants to assist returning veterans with disabilities interested in agricultural production to succeed!

Welcome Julie York

Julie is the new Oklahoma AgrAbility Program Coordinator. She received a Bachelor of Science in Home Economics Education and Community with a Minor in Communications from Oklahoma State University. Julie comes to us from the Noble County Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. As the Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educator there, Julie promoted leadership and resource management while developing community coalitions.

As Program Coordinator Julie creates and updates educational materials, conducts presentations, and designs promotional materials such as: the quarterly newsletter, news releases, and the project web site. Julie also fulfills networking and educational opportunities with the agricultural component of the project by attending conferences and giving public speaking events about AgrAbility.

If there are any questions or comments please feel free to reach out to Julie by email at julie.york@okstate.edu or by phone at 405-744-6882.



Council Update

BJ Nevels is a valued member of the Oklahoma AgrAbility Advisory Council. BJ joined the Advisory Council within the last year and feels he can offer his 25 years of experience in working with individuals with disabilities to further the efforts of Oklahoma AgrAbility. BJ is a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Department of Veteran Affairs and has been there for 3 ½ years; prior to that he worked as a Community Education Specialist with INTEGRIS-Jim Thorpe Rehabilitation Hospital. BJ has been aware of AgrAbility for several years because he tries to keep informed of available resources. "We all need to have an awareness of community based programs and services in a better coordinated effort to provide quality services to those individuals with disabilities that we work with on a personal and professional basis. AgrAbility assists farmers, ranchers and agricultural based workers to remain on the farm and to enjoy the ability to live and function independently in a setting that they are accustomed to and enjoy being in."



Spotlight on Oklahoma AgrAbility:

AgrAbility Day at the Capitol & Partner of the Year

On Monday afternoon, March 28, 2011, a tractor and truck sat on the South Lawn of the Oklahoma State Capitol. The tractor demonstrated a modification enabling a person to walk, not climb, into the driver's seat; while the truck's unique engineering makes it drivable by someone who uses a wheelchair. Their purpose that day was to educate and draw attention to AgrAbility Day at the Capitol.

"Our general purpose for AgrAbility Day at the Capitol was to educate legislators, recognize a partner of Oklahoma AgrAbility and help legislators get a better sense of who we are," said Linda Jaco, Oklahoma AgrAbility Co-Director. "We hope this showed the need for state support to provide additional services to our rural clients."

Exhibits and demonstrations showcased the services and accomplishments of several cooperating organizations. These included Langston University's School of Physical Therapy; Oklahoma Assistive Technology Foundation, represented by ABLE Tech; Oklahoma State University represented by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service; Choctaw Indian Nation, Department of Rehabilitation Services and the Oklahoma Farmers & Ranchers Association.

Attending the event was Dr. Jorge H. Atilas, Associate Dean, Extension & Engagement/Assistant Director for OCES.

"It was great to see how many partners came together for AgrAbility Day at the Capitol," he said. "The exhibits were very informative and really highlighted the complexity of the issues our farmers with disabilities face in Oklahoma, but most importantly, they presented so many resources and educational programs available to address these issues."

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) was honored as 2011 Oklahoma AgrAbility Partner of the Year with Dr. Mike O'Brien, DRS Director, accepting the award. DRS works with eligible clients of the AgrAbility Project providing qualified assistance to help farmers and ranchers continue to work. Often, AgrAbility clients are disabled by an injury sustained on the farm or ranch, and assistive technology – such as hydraulics, computerization, motorized lifts, modifications to farm buildings, farm tools and automated gates – can be adapted to keep a farmer or rancher working.

The Oklahoma AgrAbility Project Act became law in 2007, but did not provide any funding. The Act allows Oklahoma farmers and ranchers with disabilities to access the education, assistance and support needed to be more independent with their agricultural operations.



VA Assistive Technology Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a wide range of benefits so that veterans can receive assistive technology from various services including, disability, education and training, vocational rehabilitation and employment, home loan guaranty, and medical treatment. The VA provides a standard enhanced health benefits plan available to all enrolled veterans. This plan emphasizes preventive and primary care, and offers a full range of outpatient and inpatient services within VA Health Care System.

Eligibility for veterans' benefits is complex. Not all veterans are eligible for all benefits. Generally, if a veteran is eligible for admission to a VA Medical Center (VAMC), then any disabilities he or she has will be treated/covered. Veterans should contact the Benefits Counselor at the Veterans Affairs Regional Office in Muskogee by calling: 1-800-827-1000 to determine eligibility status. Enrolled veterans receiving VA care for any condition may receive "medically necessary" VA prosthetic appliances, equipment and devices, such as artificial limbs, orthopedic braces and shoes, wheelchairs, crutches, canes, and other durable medical equipment and supplies. VA provides grants to assist in making certain home improvements or structural alterations that are medically necessary. VA will provide hearing aids and eyeglasses to veterans who receive increased pension based on the need for regular aid and attendance or being permanently housebound, receive compensation for service-connected disability or are former prisoners of war.

For more information, go to the VA Benefits in Brief on the web at: <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-0760-ARE.pdf>. The document provides an at-a-glance description of VA benefits, as well as contact phone numbers and locations.





On the Horizon: AgrAbility Events

- April 12, AgrAbility Advisory Council, Stillwater
- April 13, AgrAbility In-Service, Oklahoma County Extension office, OKC
- April 14, Gardening with Disabilities Workshop, Wes Watkins Center, Stillwater
- May 3-4, Oklahoma Statewide FFA Convention, Oklahoma City
- May 26-27, Langston University Small Farmers Conference, Oklahoma City
- July 12, AgrAbility Advisory Council, Stillwater

About this newsletter

This is a quarterly publication available via mail, e-mail and the Web at www.agrability.okstate.edu. For more information about this newsletter please contact AgrAbility at 888-885-5588 (voice/tty) or e-mail ability@okstate.edu.



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