

Problem Solvers

AgrAbility's online database, The Toolbox, offers ideas for overcoming farm and ranch obstacles.

by *Kindra Gordon*

Farmers and ranchers can attest to the physical demands of their jobs, which often result in arthritis, back injuries and other health issues. Add to that the increasing age of the average farmer or rancher, and for many folks it can be a challenge to get the work that they love done.

Steve Swain visits with these folks all the time.

"Farmers are getting older but not retiring," he says. "It's not unusual that I get calls from 70-year-old or 75-year-old farmers looking for information on managing a problem."

Folks contact Swain because he works as a technology specialist for a unique project called AgrAbility, which aims to make agriculture accessible — and easier — for ag workers with disabilities. The disabilities may range from arthritis to visual or hearing impairments to amputations, paralysis or brain injuries.

The user-friendly database can be searched by physical challenge, such as a listing of products to help individuals who suffer from arthritis.

To assist these individuals, AgrAbility, which receives funding from USDA, has amassed a myriad of products or simple product modifications to help with farm and ranch chores. They are featured in The Toolbox Assistive Technology Database on the AgrAbility website, <http://agrability.org/toolbox>.

Nearly 1,000 products

Swain explains that solutions in the database come from everyday farm producers to equipment manufacturers. AgrAbility staff scout farm

shows and farm publications for unique problem-solving inventions. They then evaluate their safety and effectiveness before adding them to the online database.

Some examples of the products include

add-on tractor steps with a handrail to make it easier and safer to enter and exit the tractor cab, ideas for portable calf carts, and several trailer hitching aids — from an old truck mirror mounted on the trailer to a 2-foot-tall guide rod that can be attached to the hitch so it is seen by the driver.

The user-friendly database can be searched by physical challenge, such as a listing of products to help individuals who suffer from arthritis. Bionic gloves and a faucet/valve turner come up in the search if you search for arthritis.

Alternatively, you can browse by type of equipment. Categories under the beef topic area include "Calving and Calf Care Equipment" and "Cattle Restraint Equipment." There are topic areas for fencing, tractors, trucks and much more, including gardening.

Each database listing includes a description of the product, the product source and cost, the limitation it addresses and contact information for the product. AgrAbility does not sell any of the items; commercial items must be purchased direct from the source. For some of the homemade product solutions, instructions and an image are shown so you can make them yourself.

Most items in the database are modestly priced. For more expensive items, such as lifts, AgrAbility can often assist individuals in finding financial assistance.

To browse the database, visit www.agrability.org and click on Toolbox Assistive Technology Database.

AgrAbility consists of the National AgrAbility Project (NAP) and State/Regional AgrAbility Projects. There currently are 25 states with AgrAbility programs in partnership with their state's land-grant university. Contact AgrAbility at 1-800-825-4264.



► This set of add-on tractor steps with handrail provides an example of the problem-solving inventions included in the AgrAbility Toolbox.

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