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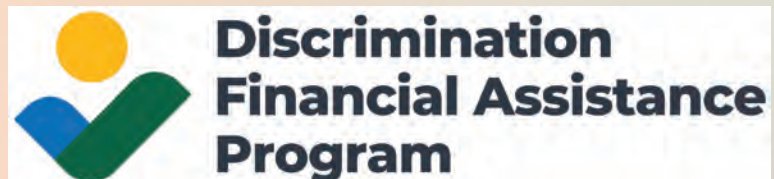
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New financial support opportunities for farmers with disabilities

Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act authorized \$2.2 billion in financial assistance to farmers and ranchers, including those with disabilities, who experienced discrimination in USDA Farm Loan Programs prior to January 1, 2021. The deadline for applying is January 13, 2024.

Visit www.agrability.org/discrimination for more information, including (1) a summary fact sheet on eligibility requirements, deadlines, the application process, and getting assistance, and (2) the *Farmers' Guide to USDA Discrimination Financial Assistance Program*.

Also, the 2024 AgrAbility National Training Workshop has been scheduled for March 25-28 in Atlanta,



Georgia, at the Grand Hyatt Atlanta/Buckhead. Indiana AgrAbility is offering travel stipends to Indiana farmers with disabilities and family members/caregivers to help cover the costs of attending this event. Visit www.agrability.org/ntw for more information about the conference and to access the stipend application.



A newsletter dedicated to friends of the Indiana AgrAbility Project/Breaking New Ground Outreach Program

Elise Koning: Multifaceted Farmer

A rich farming heritage and diverse skill set mean many options

Tucked into the hills of Parke County is the ground that Elise Koning farms, just as six generations of her family did before her. While in some ways she is following in their footsteps, Elise is forging her own new path through a diverse combination of ventures.

Born into agriculture, Elise received her first lamb at age four, and sheep have continued to be a major part of her life. After serving as a state FFA officer, earning a bachelor's degree in agricultural communications at Purdue, and obtaining a masters in agricultural and extension education at Penn State, she spent a year in

New Zealand, primarily to work with sheep. Today, she and her husband raise the Shetland and Shropshire breeds, the former for wool production and the latter primarily for meat sales.

However, sheep are just one aspect of the Konings' agricultural enterprise. They have begun a Christmas tree farm and have planted hundreds of trees so far. When the trees mature, Elise and her husband plan to open the farm to the public as a U-cut agritourism destination. They also hope to incorporate the sheep by allowing visitors to



Elise uses rotational grazing for her sheep with the help of llamas that guard the flocks

voices some of the networks' radio stories and hosts multiple podcasts. In addition, Elise is a freelance writer with articles and stories featured in multiple publications, including *The Saturday Evening Post*.

When Elise began having difficulty with farm tasks because of issues like migraines, dizziness, and limited endurance, she reached out to Purdue and was connected with Steve Swain of Indiana AgrAbility. He conducted farm assessments and has worked with Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation to

(Continued on p. 2)



Elise tending to some hungry ewes in the barn

walk with halter-trained ones, and the family's Clydesdales might also be hitched up for transporting Christmas trees from the fields to the buyers' vehicles.

Apart from on-farm activities, Elise works with Hoosier Ag Today and Michigan Ag Today as a specialist in digital strategies and video production. She also

Out & About with AgrAbility

EDUCATION & AWARENESS PAST & FUTURE



Bill Field, AgrAbility director, talks with an attendee at Farm Aid

AgrAbility had the unique opportunity to exhibit at 2023 Farm Aid Homegrown Village, a part of the annual Farm Aid concert and festival, which was held in Noblesville, Indiana, September 23. AgrAbility joined organizations from throughout the country in educating thousands of concertgoers about the importance of agriculture and farmers.

Some upcoming events for Indiana AgrAbility include:

- Fort Wayne Farm Show, Fort Wayne, IN, January 16-18
- Veterans IN Farming 2024 Workshop, Fair Oaks, IN, January 19-21
- National Farm Machinery Show, Louisville, KY, February 14-17
- AgrAbility National Training Workshop, Atlanta, GA, March 25-28

Veterans have new organization, new opportunities in ag

Indiana veterans have a new resource for building their careers in agriculture: Veterans IN Farming. The organization was launched in March 2023 to provide mentoring to help veterans be successful in homesteading, farming, ranching, and other types of agriculture.

Among its many activities, Veterans IN Farming is sponsoring a three-day conference at Fair Oaks Farms on January 19-21, 2024. Topics include business planning, marketing, acquiring property, USDA resourcing opportunities, beekeeping, grant application tips, and managing farm stress. For more information visit vetsinfarming.wildapricot.org or www.facebook.com/VetsINFarming. The cost is \$100, and ticket stipends are available to members of the



Indiana AgVets Program. Contact Linda Tarr at ltarr@hoosieruplands.org or 812-849-4447 about AgVets.

Veterans IN Farming also supports two veteran-run farms: Porter Farm in Danville and Jack's Farm in Anderson. Both sites give veterans the opportunity to try out various farming options to find the best fit for their interests and abilities.

Joe Ricker, veteran outreach coordinator for Indiana AgrAbility and National AgrAbility, is president of Veterans IN Farming. He was also the "Featured Farmer" on August 18 at the 2023 Indiana State Fair. Joe and his family operate At Ease Orchard in Hancock County, which they run as a nonprofit organization with a mission of helping veterans and first responders improve their well-being and to find purpose through beekeeping, fruit trees, and other farming skills.



Joe Ricker, left, with his wife and son were Featured Farmers at the Indiana State Fair

Koning (continued from p. 1)

secure authorization for several assistive technologies, including battery-powered hoof trimmers and a utility vehicle with an enclosed cab, air conditioning, and heat. Elise believes the UTV, when delivered, will be a game-changer by helping her extend her endurance and reduce strain.

Diversification can be the key to success in many areas, and Elise Koning is using her multiple talents to establish a solid and innovative career in agriculture. AgrAbility is glad to be part of her journey.

New outreach to the Old Order: AgrAbility and the Amish

Indiana has the third largest Amish population of any state, just behind Pennsylvania and Ohio. Old Order groups like the Amish have a self-directed mandate to maintain a level of separation from the larger society. However, Indiana AgrAbility has developed relationships within Old Order communities that have led to meaningful impact.

Purdue's Agricultural Safety and Health Program became actively engaged with the Amish in the late 1990s because of farm fatalities within those communities. Collaborative efforts led to safety days on Amish farms, safety-related publications focused on Old Order groups, and a 1998 multi-state Extension conference on working with the Amish.

AgrAbility staff have continued networking with Old Order groups in the intervening years on disability-related issues. Bolstering the program's outreach activities was the addition of an underserved populations outreach coordinator, Chuck Baldwin, in 2013. He has coordinated the AgrAbility presence at numerous Old Order activities, such as the "Amish Handicapped Gathering" that takes place annually in Indiana and which also has a national counterpart.



Draft horses ready to roll at Horse Progress Days

In addition, AgrAbility is a regular exhibitor at events not specifically for Old Order groups, but which draw large numbers from their communities, such as Horse Progress Days and the Northern Indiana Grazing conference. Staff also participated in the planning and conducting of a 2022 Extension conference focused on Old Order groups.

Baldwin and other AgrAbility staff members also make visits to individual Amish families. Baldwin says, "Personally, I enjoy working

with the Amish because of their refreshing lack of pretense and need for standing upon personal academic or other credentials. Their desire to get to know me as a person to see if I can be trusted and their willingness to share their questions and needs once that trust is given is rewarding in itself."



Old Order community members observing field trials at Horse Progress Days

TOOLBOX Spotlight

TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE EASIER



Topper Lift System for Pickups

This combination of technologies allows users to independently store wheelchairs in the truck bed. The system operates by hand-held remote only when cab door is open. It functions in conjunction with a wheelchair hoist and power truck seat lift. The topper lift system first lifts/lowers the cargo bed topper; the wheelchair hoist lifts the chair into/out of the bed; and the power seat lift rotates out the door for transfer to or from the chair. The system is designed for full-size, standard-bed pickups with 6-, 61/2-, and 8-foot beds.

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