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

## A new vision for agriculture

There's more than corn and soybeans in Indiana

Just a stone's throw from Main Street in Plainfield, Indiana, White Lick Farm stands as a testament to how small-scale, "near-urban" agriculture can thrive. Unlike the sprawling row-crop farms commonly associated with Indiana, this compact operation offers a unique, sustainable alternative—both as a livelihood for its owners and a fresh food source for the local community.

Mandi Harty, a certified speech therapist, and her husband Adam, a pharmacist, moved to their property in 2012 with the goal of producing healthy, home-grown food for their family. That personal mission has since evolved into a diversified business featuring seasonal produce and hand-crafted soaps, lotions, and shampoos made with milk from their own goats.

Farming, however, hasn't come without its challenges. Mandi lives with rheumatoid arthritis and Stargardt disease, a genetic eye condition that causes progressive loss of central vision. To continue farming safely and effectively, she connected with AgrAbility and Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) for support.



Mandi selling produce at a farmers market

After an on-site assessment, AgrAbility identified assistive technologies to facilitate Mandi's daily tasks. Indiana VR provided a utility vehicle equipped with an enclosed cab and climate control to reduce fatigue and increase mobility. Underground water lines were installed to eliminate the need for transporting water, and automatic heated waterers were added to care for the goats and sheep year-round.

Thanks to these accommodations, White Lick Farm remains productive and community-focused. Mandi markets

her goods through CSA subscriptions, an on-farm produce stand, and local farmers markets. Customers can also order directly from [whitelickfarm.com](http://whitelickfarm.com).

Mandi Harty is not your traditional Indiana farmer in many ways. However, her story shows that farming in Indiana isn't limited by location, the amount of land one has, or disability status. With determination, a realistic business model, and help from organizations like AgrAbility and Indiana VR, success is a realistic outcome for a wide variety of farms and farmers.

## Is AgrAbility a Big Beautiful program?

2025 has brought sweeping changes to federally funded programs across the United States. Many have ceased to exist, while others have seen major changes in the way they operate.

Recently, AgrAbility experienced a temporary pause in funding as part of a broader federal review assessing alignment with the priorities of the new administration. Following this evaluation, the program was approved—with only minor adjustments—and funding resumed for fiscal year 2025.

Looking ahead, questions remain about the program's long-term federal support. Under the newly passed One Big Beautiful Bill, AgrAbility was not only included but awarded a funding increase for fiscal year 2026. However, this funding will no longer come through the traditional appropriations process. As a result, there is uncertainty about funding beyond 2026.

As it stands, Indiana AgrAbility has been granted funding through April 15, 2026. Staff remain

hopeful that the USDA will re-release a request for applications (RFA) for competitive grants before that date to sustain program operations.

Due to these uncertainties, some components of AgrAbility's regular programming—such as the annual National Training Workshop—were on hold for several months. Despite this, the team remains committed to its mission: conducting in-person farm assessments, connecting clients with Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and delivering educational outreach through workshops and other formats.

Stay tuned for future updates as AgrAbility continues to serve while navigating an evolving federal landscape.



## Out & About with AgrAbility

### EDUCATION & AWARENESS PAST & FUTURE



**AgrAbility is heading to Traverse City, Michigan, for the 2026 National Training Workshop.** Visit [www.agrability.org/ntw](http://www.agrability.org/ntw) for details and information about travel stipends for farmers with disabilities.

Upcoming events for Indiana AgrAbility include:

- Easterseals Crossroads INDATA all-day training on assistive technology for mobility impairments, Indianapolis, IN, October 8
- AgrAbility AT Expo, Huntington, IN, October 16

2026

- Fort Wayne Farm Show, Fort Wayne, IN, January 13-15
- Northern Indiana Grazing Conference, Shipshewana, IN, February 6-7
- National Farm Machinery Show, Louisville, KY, February 12-15
- AgrAbility National Training Workshop, Traverse City, MI, March 16-19

## Support for veterans in agriculture continues to grow

Veterans exploring careers in agriculture are finding strong support through AgrAbility and a range of partnering organizations.

Indiana Governor Mike Braun recently visited At Ease Orchard, a nonprofit farm operated by Joe Ricker, who also serves as AgrAbility's veteran outreach coordinator. The orchard operates as both a training ground and therapeutic space for veterans transitioning into agriculture. The farm was honored as the 2025 Non-Profit Partner of the Year by the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) in recognition of its work.

Ricker is also the founder and president of Veterans IN Farming, which hosted a two-day conference in Shipshewana on July 11–12. The conference drew more than 100 participants and featured 18 vendors offering a variety of relevant products and services. Visit Veterans IN Farming at [vetsinfarming.wildapricot.org](http://vetsinfarming.wildapricot.org).



Darin Chapman

Another key initiative supporting veterans in agriculture is the Indiana AgVets program, a grant-funded project administered by Hoosier Uplands Economic Development Corporation in partnership with AgrAbility. Renewed with a new three-year grant in 2024, the program provides internships and training to veterans seeking agricultural careers. Darin Chapman, an Air Force veteran, farmer, and former AgVets intern, has taken over program management. He can be reached at [dchapman@hoosieruplands.org](mailto:dchapman@hoosieruplands.org), and more information is available at [indianaagvets.info](http://indianaagvets.info).

## Purdue scholarship honors Life Essentials founder

A permanently endowed scholarship has been established to provide financial support to students with disabilities enrolled in the Purdue University College of Agriculture. The Breaking New Ground Scholarship Endowment was established as a means of honoring the contributions of Hubert Von Holten, founder of Life Essentials (now LifeLyfts), the company that manufactures tractor lifts and other assistive technology for farmers. Hubert's efforts have made significant improvements to the quality of life of farmers impacted by disabilities. If you are interested in supporting this effort, please visit [giving.purdue.edu/HubertVonHolten](http://giving.purdue.edu/HubertVonHolten).



Governor Braun chats with Joe Ricker

## AgrAbility trains important rehabilitation partners

Occupational therapists (OTs) play a critical role in supporting farmers with disabilities. Often working in rehabilitation facilities with newly injured individuals, OTs are frequently the first professionals to help farmers begin their journey toward recovery and renewed productivity—even before AgrAbility becomes involved. Their support can also extend well beyond the initial injury, offering long-term assistance through the rehabilitation process.



AT Expo participant experiments with tractor access lift

To help OTs serve farmers, AgrAbility partnered with Easterseals Crossroads on April 11 to host an all-day Assistive Technology (AT) Expo at Huntington University. More than 50 participants—including 27 OT students—had the opportunity to engage directly with various forms of assistive technology and farm equipment. Attendees experimented with utility vehicles, tested devices such as wheelchairs and tractor lifts, interacted with livestock, and took part in typical animal-care tasks. AgrAbility staff also provided an overview of the program's services, its AT database, and essential components of conducting on-farm assessments.

Later in the month, Program Manager Chuck Baldwin, along with Marty Cotterman of LifeLyfts by Life Essentials, delivered three-hour presentations to OT students at Indiana State University on April 18 and at Indiana University South Bend on April 30. After introductory presentations about AgrAbility and LifeLyfts, students rotated through hands-on stations designed to provide practical experience with assistive technologies used in agricultural settings.



OT students try out AT

**AgrAbility is planning another all-day AT Expo at Huntington University on October 16.** For more information about this and future expos, visit: [agrability.info/at-expo](http://agrability.info/at-expo).

## AgrAbility chosen for Forbes Accessibility 100 list

AgrAbility was recently named to the inaugural Forbes Accessibility 100. According to the magazine, "Forbes' new Accessibility 100 will elevate and celebrate the 50 people and 50 companies making the most impact in the world of Accessibility for people with disabilities. Listees will be the most significant innovators and world-changing thought leaders in fields including consumer products, education, law and legal protections, sports, technological advancement, marketing, the workplace, the arts, and more." Visit [www.forbes.com/lists/accessibility-100](http://www.forbes.com/lists/accessibility-100).

# TOOLBOX Spotlight

### TOOLS TO MAKE LIFE EASIER



### Carbonhand Grip-Strengthening Glove

With pressure sensors in its thumb, palm, and two middle fingers, the Carbonhand Grip-Strengthening Glove detects and amplifies the hand's gripping ability. As the user applies more force, Carbonhand does likewise. Worn like a regular glove, it connects to a power unit strapped to the body. A control pad on the wrist lets one switch between three profiles (via an app) for different tasks, such as needing more support for leisure and less for household activities. Available in various glove sizes and object-carrying options to fit individual needs. Some U.S. veterans have been able to acquire the Carbonhand through VA medical centers.

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