ROUGH DRAFT FORMAT

ASSOCIATION OF PROGRAMS FOR RURAL INDEPENDENT LIVING (APRIL)

AGRABILITY: AGRICULTURE BUSINESS AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

2/16/17

3:00-4:30 P.M. EST

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>> As folks are joining us here, we're going to get started in just about five minutes. We're waiting for our captioner to join us and one more speaker and then we'll get going.

>> Hey, folks, for those just joining us, we have our captioner with us and we will get started in just a couple of moments.

>> Looks like we have a bunch of folks joining us, and we'll get started in just one moment.

Thank you all again for joining us on the call.

>> Okay. Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you, everyone, for joining us for our very first call of the year, AgrAbility: Agriculture Business and Independent Living.

If you need to access CART for today's call, please go to the APRIL website, www.april‑rural.org, and follow the link on our home page. If you have trouble accessing it, please email me at Mary.olson@mso.emt.edu and I can help you access that. Today's call is recorded and the audio recording and transcript will be available online at our website under the IL conversations tab following the call.

We also will have information about our speakers and any materials they will be referencing throughout the call. And those should also be available right now on our home page if you would like to look at them while folks are speaking.

This just a little bit about how to participate in today's call. During today's conversation everybody is on mute. That's just to try to keep some background noise down. But if you would like to add to our topic from your experience or ask any questions, you can press \*2 to raise your hand during the presentations, and then I will make your line live.

When your line goes live, you will hear somebody say "your line is now unmuted," and that's your go ahead queue to ask your question or make your comment.

Please remember to lower your hand again with \*2 when you're finished.

Also we would love it if you evaluate our conversation on our website following the call. Again, under that IL Conversations tab. Your feedback is important to us and it can only make us stronger as an organization.

This IL conversation is presented by the IL‑NET, which is operated by the Independent Living Research Utilization Program in partnership with APRIL, NCIL and Utah State. This is provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, administration for community living, no official endorsements of the department should be inferred.

Without further adieu, I would like to introduce you to our presenters.

So today we have with us Paul Jones from the National AgrAbility Project. Cindy ‑‑ I apologize, Cindy, you're going to have to correct me. Cindy Chastain...

>> CINDY CHASTAIN: Correct.

>> Great, Veteran Outreach Coordinator, and Steve Etheridge, he's going to talk a little about vocational rehabilitation. And Tom Younkman. So when you guys speak, if you don't mind just telling us, you know, an interesting fact about yourself. I usually read some biographies but I thought since there's so many of us, it might be more fun to let you guys speak a little about yourself.

So without further adieu, I'm going to go ahead and let you guys take it away.

>> PAUL JONES: Mary, was Sarah going to be talking at all first?

>> SARAH LAUNDERVILLE: I am right here. So hi, I'm Sierra Roster, I work with Mary at Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living. I'm the youth programs coordinator. And one of the other things I'm responsible for circle AgrAbility.

So before we got into the nitty‑gritty of AgrAbility, I wanted to give everybody just a little information of how APRIL and AgrAbility really got to where we're at today.

So for the past eight years, the National AgrAbility Project and APRIL have collaborated on an informal basis.

Billy, our Executive Director has been a member of the National AgrAbility Advisory Committee, and through that time together, we just really have a natural connection of what both of our organizations do. We both serve rural America and we both serve individuals with disabilities. So we understand some of the challenges and some of the strengths out there for people living in rural or remote settings, farmers and so on.

So within that, we have actually formalized a partnership now, and we are hoping that through this partnership with APRIL and AgrAbility we're really able to get some new information resources out there. So that's one of the things you're going to be seeing a lot of. From APRIL you might have been seeing some of our emails from our listserv go out to our membership. If you have joined our Facebook page or "liked" it, and the Twitter account if you follow us there, we have stuff from across the country and also just rural information, Rural America and consumers that may be living in rural areas.

So that has been going on already and you will continue to see that. One of the things you might have seen go out is the AgrAbility's national workshop that will be coming up in March. We sent that out.

And then if you were able to attend our conference this past year you saw a presentation from Paul, who is getting ready to speak, and then Billy and myself, who kind of talked a little about what AgrAbility is.

With our work together we're hoping to really just be able to provide a natural connection for centers and for the state AgrAbility projects.

We know that lots of centers are serving farmers and people that are working in agriculture and they also are serving the community that serves individuals, maybe businesses that serve consumers with disabilities. So we want to be a bridge for both those organizations to really connect and be able to collaborate.

AgrAbility has a wealth of knowledge that you'll hear about today that I think will really add to what your center is already doing and how you're serving your consumers, and one of the really exciting things for myself and for AgrAbility, of course, is our work that we're going to start doing with youth. One of our goals is to get more youth engaged in opportunities that are out there. We want to encourage young people to get involved with FFA, which is the Future Farmers of America, and the 4Hs, and we want youth with disabilities to learn they have an option and opportunities to go into the agriculture business, that they have resources that are out there that can assist them with modifications or accommodations and support. That's one thing that we're hoping to be able to bring more youth into that realm but also as centers start to work with more young people, you can connect them with us and that way we can provide them that opportunity and those resources of farmers that are out there that may have disabilities already, through a natural peer support.

That's really what this collaboration is going to provide.

One more thing. One of the things we were hoping to learn from centers, we really want to know what the centers for independent living statewide Independent Living Council, and other organizations as well, what you guys are already doing with farmers and with AgrAbility perhaps in specific. So we've created a survey, and you'll see that added to our website as well. That will be an opportunity for you to really kind of share what you guys are already doing so we can learn ‑‑ and it will be an opportunity for us to get your contact information if you would like so we can make sure you're connected with what is going on with APRIL and AgrAbility and that collaboration.

So that's a little bit of what we're doing. It's always growing, of course, and new ideas that keep coming up, which is always a great opportunity for both organizations.

But I guess I will turn it over to you, Paul, so now you can kind of explain a little bit more about AgrAbility.

>> PAUL JONES: Thanks a lot, Sierra. Thank you to APRIL and to everybody that is joining us today for your interest in our program. Mary asked that we would do a little introduction of ourselves. My name is Paul Jones and I am the manager of the National AgrAbility Project. We are housed at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, in the Department of Agricultural and biological engineering and under the umbrella of Purdue's agriculture and safety health program.

I'll talk a little bit more about how AgrAbility is structured and why we're a part of this. I've been here at Purdue with Ag safety for almost 19 years now. So I've dealt not only with AgrAbility but other issues related to agricultural safety.

Sierra did a good job in terms of explaining the relationship between APRIL and AgrAbility. Again, it's been informal for many years, back to the days of Linda Gonzales, and within the last about nine months we've formed a more formal relationship through our National AgrAbility Project Grant.

So our purpose is to try to capitalize on the strengths of both of our respective organizational groups. Today I'm going to give you a little bit of background on AgrAbility's mission. Hopefully I talked to some of you at the APRIL conference in Reno last fall. I was really encouraged by the amount of interest there was in AgrAbility with those who have no idea or limited knowledge of AgrAbility, I'll give you an overview, and then I want to talk about why the relationship or potential relationship between AgrAbility and Centers for Independent living is a win‑win for both organizations and for the consumers that we both serve.

Also I want to touch on how you can still serve agricultural workers if your state does not have an AgrAbility project. And then also what resources does AgrAbility have that can be useful to CILs that have an AgrAbility project in their state an don't have an AgrAbility project in their state.

The overall AgrAbility's mission and purpose is to work with farmers, ranchers and other agricultural workers that have some type of disability. When we threw out the word "disability," it can be a little confusing to some people because a lot of people we serve don't necessarily have a disability that rises to the level of what the ADA might define as a disability. Obviously there are some that do. We work with people that have spinal cord injuries, amputations, limited vision or hearing, a variety of disabling diseases, multiple sclerosis, cancer. But a lot of people we work with have what we would probably better term a functional limitation such as arthritis, which would not rise to the level of an ADA impairment, back issues, other joint impairments that might limit their ability to complete their farming tasks. So we deal with hopefully the whole spectrum that falls within the realm of disability and functional limitation. Not to mention mental behavioral health issues, traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder and other issues.

Just as disability is a wide continuum, we try to serve everybody within the wide spectrum of agriculture. Depending on the area of the country that you live in, you may be most familiar with row crops, you know, wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, or you may have a lot of ranches, other livestock production, sheep, goats. You might have a lot of dairy farms in your state or region. Or you might have a lot of produce, for example, Florida, Texas, California, Arizona produce a lot of vegetable crops.

It could be orchards. It might be a niche market like llamas or herbs or aqua‑culture where they raise fish or aquaponics where they use fish and produce together in a symbiotic system. It could be agri‑tourism, like a corn maze or some kind of a hayride business. So wide spectrums of service in both disability and agriculture.

In terms of our history, AgrAbility has been around as a program since 1991. We were first authorized in the Farm Bill of 1990 we function under grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Currently there are 20 state projects around the country in addition to the one national project that is headquartered here at Purdue.

You might ask why there are not 50 or, you know, enough projects to cover all the states and territories. Well, like everything, there is limited funding, and so there's only enough funding currently to go around for 20 projects. And the funding is competitive. So that may be why you don't have a project in your state. Now, some states choose not to apply for various reasons.

But you can find out if your state has an AgrAbility project at our website, which is www.agrAbility.org. I'll repeat that several times because there are a lot of resources available on that site.

One of the unique things about AgrAbility is that every AgrAbility project, both the state and the national project, are partnerships. And the grant has to be held by the land grant university in your state. If you're not sure what the land grant university in your state is, you can check that, but it's generally the one that deals with agriculture, often with engineering and other kind of practical sciences.

CILs ‑‑ excuse me, the Centers for Independent Living can be partners on AgrAbility projects, subcontractors. The land grant university has to partner with at least one disability service‑related program. That's part of the grant requirement.

So it could be Centers for Independent Living, Easter Seals, goodwill, Arthritis Foundation, a variety of organizations, just a connection with disability services.

Here at the national project, one of our main responsibilities to support the state projects, we do that by providing training, by developing resources, which could be on our website, could be audio‑visual. It could be videos. and we do our best to provide limited services to customers in states that do not have AgrAbility projects.

In terms of training, Sierra mentioned our national training workshop, and that is probably our premier event that we put on every year. It travels around the country. This year it's in Knoxville, Tennessee March 20th through the 23rd. We would invite you to consider attending. It's four days and just packed with a variety of issues related to rural and related to agriculture with rehabilitation. We have a broad range of breakout sessions, plenary sessions and tours. So we'll take you out to a variety of agriculture enterprises and rehabilitation facilities. So go to that AgrAbility.org website. You can find a link to the AgrAbility national training workshop on the main menu and also there is a link on the latest news that talks about how to register and get other information.

We talked about some of the things AgrAbility does. Some of the things we cannot do, according to the grant limitations is provide funding or direct equipment to our customers.

So we rely very heavily on our vocational rehabilitation systems in the state. So we're thankful to have Steve Etheridge, a former VR counselor to talk about the importance of vocational rehabilitation. I think Tom Younkman will touch on that also.

Our main service areas, again, education, the network with other organizations like CILs to leverage resources, provide direct assistance and then we also make sure that people are aware of or our activities and services through marketing.

Why is the relationship between AgrAbility and Centers for Independent Living a win‑win? Not only for both of our organizations but for all of the consumers that we serve. What are the services we can provide that CILs might not be able to offer and how can CILs enhance the services that we provide? AgrAbility can provide, for example, agricultural expertise. Many of you may be in rural areas, but many of you may not be farmers or have farm backgrounds. There is a unique culture to farming and agriculture. You need to be able to speak the language. You need to be able to know what the terms are.

So we can provide that. We can also network with agricultural organizations that you might not have strong relationships with, like the extension services or Farm Bureau. They all have a lot of resources that can benefit a lot of people that you might be serving. We can also provide expertise in agricultural assistive technology. I'm sure many of you are well‑versed with all kind of assistive technology but you may not know about some of the assistive technologies that can be beneficial to people with disabilities in agriculture.

You might also know about modifying work practices that can be beneficial to the people we work with.

If you're in an AgrAbility state we can provide work site assessments. If you have a consumer that is a farmer that you're not sure exactly how to assess their needs, then your AgrAbility project can provide those assessments.

We can also network with other organizations like vocational rehabilitation, as we mentioned. Also veterans groups and Cindy Chastain is going to talk more about that. We have strong relationships with the Farmer Veterans Coalition. And an extension in every county of the United States or covered ‑‑ every county is covered by cooperative extension if you don't have an office in your county. We also have a lot of resources at the land grant universities that AgrAbility is required to have as part of the grant.

So we can provide direct funding to your CIL if you are a subcontractor and provide services as an AgrAbility subcontractor. Again, that has to be in a state that has an AgrAbility project and you have to be tied into that project as a subcontractor.

Obviously we can provide awareness of the things that you're doing and your resources, and we can invite you to participate in some of our activities, like conferences and workshops.

So what do CILs provide? What do you provide that could benefit the people that AgrAbility works with?

Basically it's the five core services that every CIL provides anyway. For example, in terms of information and referral or independent living skills training, a lot of the people that we work with that may become injured or require ‑‑ or a disabling disease may have limited knowledge of the whole disability sphere, rehabilitation system, social services. They may have never thought about dealing with them. So you can provide valuable contacts and training in those areas. Peer counseling can be another excellent area where you can help out. Because farmers tend to be independent and that can result in isolation and that can result in all kinds of issues.

So somebody with a disability that is in agriculture can really benefit from peer counseling.

Individual and systems advocacy, another core area. A lot of the people we work with may not, you know, feel comfortable in that realm of advocacy. They tend to be, you know, kind of on their own and may not want to be challenging the system, but, you know, the CILs have expertise in that advocacy area that can be helpful.

Also transition services. As Sierra said, we have a lot of youth on farms with disabilities. They need to know what their options are when they get out of school.

Or, for example, an older farmer that becomes injured may be put in a nursing home and need to know what his or her options are in transitioning back home.

So a couple of things that Sierra touched on, just to reiterate in terms of what we would like to do with APRIL in the next three and a half years. We do want to distribute resources to every APRIL member that wants them. So that will be touched on in that web survey that sierra mentioned. We'll probably also send out a mailing just to let you know what we have available and let you know how to receive those if you would like them.

We're going to continue participating at each other's meetings. Sierra is coming to a national workshop in Knoxville in March. I participated in the RESNA meeting last fall. We're going to continue to do that.

The assessment that Sierra mentioned is going to be coming out soon. We want to coordinate meetings between the AgrAbility projects and the APRIL member CILs in those states.

So you probably will be getting some information about how to do that. We want to make sure you know who the AgrAbility partners are and how you can partner with them.

Just a few things there.

So what if your CIL does not have ‑‑ it's not in a state that has an AgrAbility project? One of the things I want to do in the next three and a half years is to try to develop what we might call a roadmap to services that might be a web‑based kind of module. For example, if you have a consumer that is a farmer and you don't know how to deal with them, we would kind of take you step‑by‑step through the process and give you tips on who to contact, provide some direct resources. So we're going to be working on that. And you can always ask the National AgrAbility Project for support if you have a farmer but don't have an AgrAbility project in your state. You can contact us through the website, AgrAbility.org, or directly through the AgrAbility.org email address. And also encourage your state land grant university to apply for an AgrAbility grant. The funding cycle application process just ended for this year but next year there should be about 15 slots open, so it's going to be a big year. If you're in a state that does not have a project, encourage your land grant university extension service to apply for one.

So quickly, because my time is running out. Resources, again, go to the AgrAbility.org website. It is mobile friendly. You can pull up the pages on your Smart Phone. We've got all kinds of resources, one of which, the most visited section of the website is the toolbox, assistive technology database. Almost 1300 products that could help somebody in agriculture with a disability, all the way from tractors to livestock production, gardening, lawn care, fencing, how to, you know, work with seed and grain.

So check that out. It's got a lot of resources, a variety of arthritis related resources, since back impairments are a big deal. We just did a publication recently on back problems.

Also, for those that might be needing some kind of guidance, if you're a non‑agrAbility state and you want to do an assessment, we do have an assessment tool that takes you there the entire process. Go to the resource link and go to work site and vocational issues. You can find that. It's about a 30‑page manual. It's got forms you can reproduce and fill out, and it takes you through the entire process.

So I'm going to stop there for now and, Mary, if you want to invite questions for this part of the presentation, I would welcome that now and then we'll move on to Cindy.

>> MARY: Thanks so much, Paul. Why don't we go ahead and do this. Let's move right along into Cindy, and if folks do have questions, can you please press \*2 on your phone so that it raises your hand. And once we have a full queue we'll stop for questions after Cindy. So, again, if you do have questions at any time, you can press \*2 to raise your hand and then we can ‑‑ as soon as we start getting some of those, we can start questions.

So Cindy, why don't you go ahead and take it away. Thanks, Paul!

>> CINDY CHASTAIN: Okay, thank you for inviting me to participate in your conference call. A little bit about me, I grew up on a family farm in Indiana and then joined the army and have a Purdue ag degree but never used it because then I spent the next 30‑something years in the service. I retired in 2010 and moved back to the family farm and started here working for AgrAbility in just a little over two years ago.

So my purpose here is I'm the Veteran Outreach Coordinator for the national AgrAbility program, and kind of my job is to make sure that the veterans out there that are either interested in or are farming know about AgrAbility, no what services we can provide, and that we can help them be able to achieve whatever they want to achieve in the world of agriculture.

Some of the things that we do is ‑‑ I also not only talked to veterans but those that serve veterans, veteran organizations or people like ‑‑ like you guys out there, independent living centers, that work with veterans and try to help them understand maybe how to deal with veterans and what some of their issues are.

You know, I work a lot with finding resources for veterans, finding referrals, and just giving advice on their farming projects. I work very closely with the Farmer Veteran Coalition, a national organization with thousands of members, most of them veterans that are either farming or want to farm all around the country.

And I work with a lot of beginning farmers program, because a lot of the veterans, especially veterans of the global war on terror are new to farming or fairly new to farming.

So a lot of beginning veteran programs are funded with veterans in mind.

So we do work with a lot of beginning farmer programs.

So why is it important ‑‑ why is agriculture a thing that we want to talk about to veterans? And there's several reasons. About 45%, some 45 to 48% of veterans actually come from rural communities around the country. And when they get out of the service they return to that rural community. And they may have grown up on a farm, but if they lived in a rural community, they're familiar with farming. ‑‑ And some of them either had ideas before that they wanted to find but definitely when they get out of the service they want to farm because they're having trouble assimilating back into society.

You know, of course, you've heard the statistics about unemployment, hopelessness, divorce, suicide, those are higher among combat veterans than the normal population.

There's an estimated 20% of veterans that have served in combat that have traumatic brain injuries.

And you can also say that veterans have the training and skills suited to farming. You know, veterans are used to the idea of an operation that, you know, there's no time boundaries, you don't work necessarily from 9:00 to 5:00 on a farm and you don't in the service also. So it's kind of mission oriented, you work until the job is done.

So veterans and some of their skills are very suited to farming.

And we found that ‑‑ and I'm not sure that it's all anecdotal, there are studies going around about the therapeutic benefits of farming for those who are suffering from posttraumatic stress or traumatic brain injuries.

The average age of the American farmer is around 60 years old, and many don't have anybody to replace them.

So this is a good time for some veterans that need employment, want to farm, to be able to replace those farmers.

So I put on your website or I had Mary put on your website a presentation that I give occasionally to those that are not ‑‑ that don't normally work with veterans. It's kind of understanding military culture, so that people don't normally work with veterans have an idea how to deal with those veterans. And I think it's important that you understand those cultural barriers so you can develop a rapport and common language that is needed to talk to those veterans.

Especially the do's and don't's I think are important. There are some things you don't want to do with veterans. So first of all, what is a veteran? A veteran is ‑‑ for our purposes, it's anybody who has ever served in the United States Armed Forces. And that could be for a year or 30 years. It doesn't matter. Anybody that has ever served is a veteran.

And the VA systems may require some different categories for services, but for our purposes, a veteran is a veteran. And it doesn't have to ‑‑ a lot of veterans out there might be a little bit shameful of the fact that maybe they didn't serve in a combat position, but there was a lot of time in this nation's history where we weren't at war and veterans that served in those capacities during that time may not have had the opportunity to deploy and to serve overseas in combat situations. It doesn't make any difference for any of the services that we provide or should provide.

I think it's important to know that a veteran has served and the duty on our country that is instilled in them is really ‑‑ it means a lot. And no matter how short the service of that person, that period of their life remains an important part of their life.

Only one in four Americans now ‑‑ so less than 25% of Americans have an actual connection to someone in the military. So some of the reasons, of course, we know of recently is that post‑9/11, enlistments went way up because of the sense of responsibility or service that people felt. But our military is still an all voluntary force and has been for the past 48 years.

Again, rural young kids from rural communities join the service sometimes just to escape from their normal lives. But when they get out, a lot of times they want to return to those rural lives.

A lot of service members are ‑‑ get used to the idea of the structure of their military life. They have a chain of command. The organization is very hierarchical. There's right and wrong. There's regulations and standard operating procedures for everything we do. So sometimes when that structure is taken away from them, they're a little bit lost. They're a little bit ‑‑ they have trouble going into a civilian world where the lines aren't as clear.

Some of the differences between what we are experiencing now and what happened in past situations, like the Vietnam War and the Korean War, were very unpopular, so those that were ‑‑ those that returned from those situations were treated pretty poorly. There is a higher incidence of alcoholism, homelessness, undiagnosed PTSD, and nowadays you're going to find that the survival rates were much higher since Desert Storm and the latest OEF, the survival rates are higher but they may have severe injuries that they survived, but they were treated like heroes when they returned home normally, but they will have mental health issues but maybe the mental health issues don't carry the stigma of previous Korean and Vietnam War soldiers still experiencing some of that stigma.

So the positives of military services, for those that you encounter, leadership skills, especially under duress. They're normally, for their age, going to be pretty mature and focused, confident, and they're all in for some kind of camaraderie with their community. So farming is also a way for them to reintegrate themselves into their community, to sense ‑‑ to get that sense of community back.

So how do you talk to a veteran if that's not something you normally do?

Do you thank them for their service? I think it's okay that you do so. Sometimes a veteran might find that uncomfortable because, you know, how do you respond to that?

But listen to them non‑judgmentally when you ask them about their service, ask open ended question. Be aware about their feelings, their possible feelings about shame or survivor's guilt or their problems dealing with the stress that they have. And if you offer them help or support, please follow through with that. If you don't follow through with something that you promised them, they won't trust you again and won't come back to you.

Make sure that their families are involved in all of the decisions. Make sure their families are also aware of the services that are available to them.

Don't act like you know how they're feeling, and don't get into a discussion with them on political views of the war or any of that. I just would advise you not to do that. Don't rush them into anything. Don't talk to them about or ask for specific counts of their traumatic events in their military service unless they want to tell you what those are.

And don't make decisions for them. Unless a person is suicidal, let them make decisions on their own.

For combat injuries, the mortality rate in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are only 10%. Where in World War II the mortality rates and injuries was above 30%. We have more survivors, more survivors with long‑term injuries and disabilities.

97% of injuries were caused by explosions. Mostly IEDs. Improvised explosive devices.

50% of injuries were to their head and neck. And 20% ‑‑ we talked about this earlier ‑‑ of the wounded had some degree of brain injury. So the signature injuries of OEF and OIF are eye injuries and, of course, lower extremities, injuries and amputations, traumatic brain injuries are very common, and repeated serial traumatic brain injuries.

So one after the other makes the injury much more severe.

So we also have the more times a person has deployed also increases their risk for injuries. Increased risk for posttraumatic stress disorder, can increase risk for depression, alcohol‑related problems. And all of these problems are not mutually exclusive.

So let's talk just a minute about PTSD. Posttraumatic stress ‑‑ some people don't like to use the disorder, just call it posttraumatic stress ‑‑ is an anxiety disorder. It's characterized by emotional instability after a stressful event.

So that trauma overwhelms what the person usually uses as a psychological defense. And traumatic brain injury has very similar symptoms to PTSD, but they are different. A person can have traumatic brain injury and PTSD at the same time, but they have very similar symptoms.

They have distressing dreams. They avoid and detach themselves from people and their lives. Loss of initiative. They're hyper‑aroused. They can't sleep. They're quick to anger. Concentration, they have a lack of concentration. So they're hyper‑vigilant. You know, you might see them sitting in corners in restaurants with their ‑‑ facing the door because they can't have their back to the door.

They might have panic attacks, palpitations, sweating, feelings of choking, fear of dying and losing control.

Now, those are very similar to the traumatic brain injury symptoms. Same thing. Sleeping problems, irritability, depression.

So it's not for us to determine which one they have. Hopefully they'll get the medical treatment that they can for these ‑‑ there are different treatments for each of these symptoms, but a lot of these veterans find that agriculture is soothing to them, working with animals, getting out of bed in the morning to go take care of ‑‑ to take care of their chickens, where, you know, they might stay on the couch all day if they didn't have those chickens to get them out of bed.

I've had veterans tell me that going to the farmers market and having to talk to the community members to sell their product helped them get out of their shell a little bit and helped them re‑energize their commitment to their community.

So those are all kind of reasons why agriculture is both good for the veteran and the veteran is good for agriculture.

So I think that that concludes what I had to say. I don't know if you want to open it up for questions now, Mary, or wait until the end.

>> MARY: Thank you so much, Cindy. I do have a couple folks in the queue, so let's go ahead and turn this into a conversation.

All right. So, again, when I make your line live, you will hear somebody say "your line is now unmuted" and go ahead and start then.

All right, caller, go ahead, please.

>> CALLER: My name is ed Kennedy. I'm in Spokane, Washington. Because we don't know who else are on the call, are we going to get advised from who else from our state might be on this call?

Hello?

>> MARY: You know, I actually ‑‑ I don't usually do that just because our conversations are non‑registered ‑‑ you don't have to register for them and folks can just join. However, I think that's a great thing to throw your name out there, and if others from Washington are on the call, you know, maybe ‑‑ I'm willing to entertain how we can make that happen. Sorry!

>> CALLER: Okay.

>> SIERRA: I was going to say, if you want to send me your information, that's one of the roles I have with APRIL is to be able to connect you to people that in your state that are working on this. If you want to email me, I can get you connected.

>> CALLER: Okay, that's great. I have a follow‑up question if I can do that.

>> MARY: Please, go ahead.

>> CALLER. Does it matter what the status of a discharge of a veteran was, honorable, dishonorable, combat related, noncombat related disability?

>> Not for AgrAbility services. AgrAbility services will ‑‑ AgrAbility program will not ask anybody for paperwork to prove either their disability or their status of their discharge.

Now, if you're asking for VA services, VA/VR services, yes, it will matter if they have a dishonorable discharge other than honorable discharge. There will be some services through the VA that they won't be qualified for.

But AgrAbility won't ask those questions.

>> CALLER: Thank you.

>> PAUL JONES: Just an aside, Washington does not currently have an AgrAbility project but we did hear that Washington state is planning to apply. So it's possible you may have one within the next nine months.

>> CALLER: Excellent.

>> MARY: Thank you so much.

All right. Go ahead, caller.

>> CALLER: Yeah, this is Rick from Wyoming, and I was formerly ‑‑ or I was connected with AgrAbility and then our state just recently was not able to renew their AgrAbility project program, and it was due to some staffing. We had lost a person at the university who was working with AgrAbility and we haven't found a new person to take his place yet. And I wanted to add to what Paul mentioned earlier about working in a state that does not have a program. I work in an independent living center here in Wyoming and without the AgrAbility program we still ‑‑ that doesn't stop me from still providing the services because, in my viewpoint, as an IL specialist, before I pretty much specialized in home modifications, adaptations within the home, but in a farming situation, those adaptations just extend to outside the home. And so as independent living specialist, I still can meet with the farmer or rancher and go over things outside that are a hindrance to them being able to be independent and still through ‑‑ still even offer an assessment outdoor, a farming type assessment as an IL specialist. So it does work. It does work to be an independent living specialist in a state that does not have a program. And besides my knowledge of the independent living background, I have knowledge of a lot of different resources for funding that I may not have known about otherwise.

So, yeah, I just wanted to add to what Paul said that it does work to keep a program going in a state that does not have an AgrAbility program, but hopefully Wyoming might be able to get a project going again in the near future.

>> PAUL JONES: Thanks, Rick, for making that comment and appreciate the work you have done out there. You guys have done a great job.

>> CALLER: Yeah, AgrAbility is just a great resource for, you know, even as an IL specialist, a website is a great resource for an independent living specialist for knowing what all is out there. So, yeah, thank you.

>> MARY: That's great. Thank you, Rick, for sharing.

So, again, if there are folks on the line that would like to join the conversation by adding comments or questions, please press \*2 to raise your hand. And at this point our queue is empty, and so I'll go ahead and let Steve go ahead and take it away.

>> Thank you very much. This is Steve Etheridge, certified rehabilitation counselor and I work for the National AgrAbility Project. My responsibility there is to assist with any questions or concerns that are related to vocational rehabilitation.

I guess what I would like to do today, briefly, is touch on the importance of vocational rehabilitation both to AgrAbility's mission and to APRIL's mission and then to talk for some general overview comments in regard to vocational rehabilitation or purpose, how they provide services, those sorts of things. And if I don't get too wound up, I probably won't go over my time then.

So anyway, as introduction to the connection of VR to AgrAbility in APRIL, APRIL on their mission statement or vision statement is dedicated to advancing the rights and responsibilities of people with disability in rural America. And AgrAbility, as Paul mentioned, their purpose or their vision is to enhance the quality of life for farmers, ranchers and other agricultural workers with disability.

A vocational rehabilitation's whole purpose is to assist people with disability in returning to work or going to work for a the first time, and to fulfill their potential in that regard.

So, you know, there is the inter‑relationship between the three organizations.

Working with people with disability to improve quality of life and, of course, employment is a big aspect of that.

So vocational rehabilitation can provide any service that is related to one or both of two things. One is the employment goal, the person with the disability, and the second thing are the functional limitations or vocational impediments of that person or the barriers that prevent them from doing the tasks and duties of the job or would prevent them from, perhaps, doing the job.

What I'm going to do is elaborate a little more on those things.

So from a vocational rehabilitation perspective, employment is always going to be the goal, and the ideal situation is for a person to go ‑‑ to return to work at the same job with the same employer. The other combinations are same job/different employer, different job/same employer, and then different job/different employer.

When you consider a farm worker or a farm owner, an ag producer, same job/same employer is essentially what they want to do. They own the farm and they want to go back and run the business. And that's, from the vocational rehabilitation perspective, or at least my perspective as a vocational rehabilitation counselor, that was the ideal circumstance.

The starting point with vocational rehabilitation would be a referral, and that would consist of name, address, telephone number, date of birth, diagnosis, disability, and then whoever is making the referral. You could refer on their behalf. They can refer themselves. A person can refer themselves. From my perspective, again, as a VR counselor, all I needed was a name and way to contact a person so that I could get back with them.

After the referral, the next step would be to make application and to have an orientation or an information session in regard to vocational rehabilitation.

Eligibility for vocational rehabilitation is based on three things. One is that there's a diagnosis of disability or disabling condition. The second is that the result of that is what we call substantial vocational impediments or major barriers that prevent a person from getting and keeping a job or a person from returning to the work they were doing and the third thing is are there services that vocational rehabilitation can provide that would address those things?

So by vocational impediment ‑‑ and I'll just briefly explain that.

Forty years ago I cut timber in Idaho. I was walking on uneven ground, carrying a chainsaw, up and down, that sort of thing, and currently ‑‑ probably when I was about 50 I developed a bulging disc, herniated disc. And so I can probably cut wood. I can cut a tree and, you know, I can do those things for four hours with four ibuprofen. I can no longer do that full eight hours day after day after day as I did back when I was much younger. And so if that were my job, I could no longer do that because of the ‑‑ you know, the swelling, the inflamed nerves and pain running down the leg and that sort of thing.

And you no longer are walking uneven ground. Those are the impediments, no longer lifting a chainsaw, no longer moving the tree tops or moving the limbs away from the tree. So that would be the vocational impediment. Those would be the things that would prevent me, if I were still a logger, it would prevent me from doing that.

So those are the things that we focus on in regard to eligibility. For persons eligible for services, the next step is what we call a comprehensive assessment and that's where some evaluation things may come in, work site evaluation or on‑farm assessment or evaluation. That's where considerations for assistive technology would come in. Part of the comprehensive assessment is simply reviewing, you know, medical records and confirming not only limitations but also confirming abilities and potentials, desires, you know, what the person is most interested in doing and what they want to do.

Following that, what is called an individualized plan for employment or an IPE. And the IPE consists of three parts. One, a job goal. Two, services. And then three, rights and responsibilities. The person ‑‑ the language we use in vocational rehabilitation was "consumer." So the consumer has input and is expected ‑‑ the rehab act is very clear, the consumer should have input in the development of the rehabilitation plan. And the services related to that job goal and the outcome.

And that's very important, that the plan is developed to the consumer's satisfaction and with their input because that's what services are going to be based on. As I mentioned, vocational rehabilitation can provide any service related to one or two ‑‑ or both of two things, and that is the employment goal. And secondly the functional limitations or the vocational impediments.

And I treated the employment plan ‑‑ the individualized plan for employment, I always treated that as a contract or as an agreement that the consumer and I are agreeing that this is the job goal and these are the necessary services. these are the services required for that person to attain the goal.

So an example would be ‑‑ and this is in the case of the neighbor ‑‑ probably farm well over 600 acres, and both livestock and row crop. And after harvest, must have been November, a completely full gravity wagon came unhitched and unblocked and rolled over him. So a lot of damage to his right arm and then also damage to a hip. And so he could no longer, you know, lift and carry as he once did, and he could no longer, you know, walk some of the distances between, you know, where he had his cattle, where he has his sheep, and that sort of thing.

So vocational rehabilitation was able to do ‑‑ and AgrAbility did do the farm assessment and rotational rehabilitation was able to then ‑‑ so he could continue farming.

They did purchase one of those small ‑‑ I think it was actually a John Deere ‑‑ I don't know what they're called. UTVs or something like that ‑‑ ATV. It was more like a Gator. I forget what the John Deere ‑‑ what the trade name is. But where he could carry buckets of feed in that, you know, to the steers or he could carry the buckets of feed in the Gator out to the sheep, you know, so he didn't have to walk and carry. And then also in terms of, you know, he's got fence repair and those sorts of things. He didn't have to walk out to do that.

And another thing that AgrAbility recommended and that was done and that vocational rehabilitation paid for and that was modifications with the tractor with a handrail so the steps were a shorter distance apart and he could step up into that easier. And the third thing was they offered to design for a corral with swing gates that would allow for him to sort and be able to move his cattle better.

And so each of those things was outlined in the individualized plan for employment and therefore, you know, was able to be funded through vocational rehabilitation following up on the assessment of AgrAbility.

I guess the other thing I should mention in regard to the rehab Act, the caveat for the service that provide is that it be reasonable and necessary.

Necessary ‑‑ actually the other way around. It's necessary and reasonable. Necessary means that without this, you know, the person can't go to work. You know, necessary is pretty absolute. So you develop the rationale for that. You need a good rationale. Why is that necessary?

And then reasonable often refers to cost comparison or can the service be ‑‑ can the same service for, you know, a comparable service that would work, can it be provided in another way, either at less cost or does not involve direct cost?

So over the years I was developing rationale and, you know, addressing the things I mentioned, the job goal of vocational impediments. I cannot think of a situation that we were not able to provide, that vocational rehabilitation was not able to provide services necessary for the consumer to return to the job, you know, that were recommended.

So anyway, at that point I kind of ‑‑ that brings me to a stopping point, so I will stop.

>> MARY: Thank you so much, Steve. So, folks, again, if you have got some specific questions for Steve and others, now is the time. Press \*2 to raise your hand. I'd love to see that queue filling up. And we also ‑‑ not just questions but we want to hear from you. How are you guys serving folks in rural areas? You know, my office is located right here in Montana. I grew up on a farm in Montana, and I know that there are people out there serving folks, even though we don't have an AgrAbility grant. So we want to hear from all of you.

And in case you don't know what to say, have we got a treat, we're going to throw it over to Tom, and he's going to talk a little bit from that CIL perspective to give you guys ideas of what to share so, again, thanks, Steve. And let's move on to Tom. And at any time during this call you can press \*2 to raise your hand so that we know that there are some questions and comments out there.

Tom.

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: Thank you, Sierra. I really am impressed with the comments, Cindy's comments, Steve's, Paul's, they have really hit the nail on the head. Rick from Wyoming, I know well from the AgrAbility training, and he is right on with what he was saying, and I hope that he will continue to be a non‑affiliate member of AgrAbility. I want to, of course, tell you something about myself, because it hasn't been said. I'm an AgrAbility specialist in Vermont. I'm a lifetime AgrAbility ‑‑ lifetime agriculture person. I joined the Vermont center for independent living as an AgrAbility specialist in 2009. I'm a veteran. I have a working farm that I work with my wife. We at this point are raising meat goats.

So I would just ‑‑ I am prepared to take you through what VCIL, Vermont Center for Independent Living, has done with the last two grants with the national AgrAbility partner. We partner with the UVM extension. We lost that grant in 2014 and at that time VCIL elected to keep the affiliation with Purdue University, the national land grant college, so we could continue to work with the farmers. So our board of directors, director in the public is a very important piece of our service to a rural state. We have two cities that are considered cities and the rest of the state is considered rural. We have two offices in both of those cities. We have two offices there that will go out beyond in the community beyond and work with farmers and veterans. We do have four offices in rural areas and we do a lot of work with rural people, farmers, veterans.

So I after saying all that, we use the ‑‑ people say, well, how do you do this? And as Rick said, we're funded through the 7047 fund that allows us to ‑‑ the 704 fund that allows us to work with anybody with a disability, and the farmer and veteran fits right into that and it's a nice niche. Any independent living center can do this, and how we do it, the program we offer... I just lost my PowerPoint.

Sorry about that.

Why don't we just go ahead and ad lib it.

Well, I got to bring my PowerPoint back up.

>> MARY: That's okay, Tom. That's all right. While Tom is pulling that up, again, folks, please press \*2 if you want to raise your hand to ask a question. And, you know, Tom, when we were talking yesterday, I just know that you really were able to hit home some of the things that you do working with farmers, and, you know, sometimes there's a different language. We joked about how there's terms that you might not know as farmers. So if you have any tips on that, that would be great.

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: Well, I will tell you it's the same way that Christine was talking with military people. I am a veteran, and I appreciate what she had to say, and it's the same way with farmers. Farmers are ‑‑ a lot of them will tell you they don't have a disability. They're dragging their leg, missing some fingers, but they don't have a disability. So arthritis is there, but that's ‑‑ you know, that's not a problem.

So you really have to be able to go in and talk to the individuals about their farm and talk their language. That's very important.

I'm going to go back to my PowerPoint, which I do have back.

Wrong PowerPoint, sorry. Talk to me some more, sierra.

I do have one caller in the queue. Would you mind if I went to them while you get ready?

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: Please.

>> Caller, when you hear your line is unmuted, please talk. We're ready.

>> CALLER: Hi, my name is Dajah Lajay, I'm in upstate New York in the finger lakes region and I have a coordinator also on the line and we are actually in the process and planning stages of having done something like this and we're having excited to see this seminar, this conference coming up today, and this is exactly what we do. We both work for an independent living center and we both actually are agriculturists on the side when not at work. So we're excited to hear the story about the gentleman who just spoke about his opportunity with the goat farm in Vermont. We're definitely planning on getting more information and applying for this New York State next year.

>> That's really exciting.

>> CALLER: Thank you for the opportunity.

>> If other folks have something to add, press \*2 and get yourself in the queue. Tom, was I able to buy you enough time

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: You were. And I wanted to ‑‑ Paul wanted to make a comment. Let him make that comment.

>> PAUL JONES: I wanted the caller to know that one of the national subcontractors besides APRIL is Goodwill of the Finger Lakes. So the two staff members operate out of Geneseo, I'm not sure how close that is to you, but I'm sure they'll be glad to talk to you about AgrAbility.

>> CALLER: Thank you.

>> Thanks, Paul.

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: So I want to tell you some of the experiences I've had with independent living center. We will go to a farm and do an assessment just like any other ‑‑ we're a non‑profit and a non‑member. We're an affiliate member, not supported member of the National AgrAbility Project but we do the same services. We'll do an assessment and make recommendations and help them find the equipment and things they need to continue to live and work independently. The National AgrAbility Program has the toolbox that Paul has talked about and it is a fantastic thing to help locate things. He can find ‑‑ what do you need to do? You need a lift or backup pickup truck to get the wheelchair from the ground into the back of the truck after you transfer it. So you go there and you find that piece of equipment and it will give you resources where to find that, who to contact, contact information. It will give you a rough idea how much it might cost. So those things are really important to us. We then have peer support. When I was originally hired eight years ago, that was my main job, the builder program, which was to hook up people with newly acquired disabilities with people that had had that and lived with that disability and continued to farm. That was a very ‑‑ it is a very successful program. We have like 30 different disability people that are willing to work with other farmers, and we have Martin Pike, probably the oldest one in the Barn Builders Program, came from Purdue University, 94 years old, still will go to a hospital and talk to farmer who lost a leg or arm. He's a double amputee in 1974 and continues to help his son and grandson and granddaughter on the farm today. That has been a wonderful program for us. I've enjoyed it. I do a TBI support group with the State of Vermont, supporting traumatic brain injuries and the PTSD. As a member of the Vermont Farmer Veteran Coalition, I encourage the veterans that are coming in to join our organization and to receive services from them. My part of that is the mental health part of it because we know a lot of them come back with ‑‑ hurting we'll say.

People ask me how we fund this. We are funded through the 704, but the problem we have with this is we don't have any money for advertising or go to the national workshop. Our 704 fund does not allow us to do that, so we look for grants and different things to do that. Purdue University has been very gracious to us with brochures and any type of supplies we need. Paul and Christine have done a great job on supplying it. I just ‑‑ looks like we're about out of time and I will turn it back to you, sierra.

>> Thanks, Tom. We do have time left. I do have one more question in the queue, but then I might ‑‑ not pick on you, but I have a couple of questions for you, Tom, as well.

So first let's go back to our queue and if you would like to get yourself in line for a question, go ahead and press \*2. Speaker, your line is open.

>> CALLER: This is Ed Kennedy again. You mentioned the 704 fund. Now, specifically what are you speaking of there?

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: And I'm sorry about explaining that. I'd ask our Executive Director to be with us today, but unfortunately she had an illness that came up that she needs to be away and treated for. She could explain that, but that is a fund that most independent living centers receive from either the state or the ‑‑ through the human services or through the government, and I don't do any of that work, so I can't tell you. Maybe somebody else on the call can.

>> MARY: I'm happy to field that one. All Tom is talking about is the fact that centers for independent living receive Part C funds or Part B funds from ACL, and basically that states that we are there to be cross‑disability serving agencies, and you know, just because folks live on a farm and are in agriculture doesn't mean they don't belong in the disability community, and so I think that Tom was just saying that, you know, we working with folks in agriculture is not a new service. We can do all the same stuff that we've always done as CILs. All they are is just a different population.

>> CALLER: But you're just speaking of our general federal funds that we get?

>> MARY: Exactly. They don't have extra money. They're just saying ‑‑ Tom is saying that, you know, when they're doing their reporting at the end of the year, the 704 reports, they just say that maybe they worked with this farmer on IL skills training because they were teaching him, you know, how to use technology in his field, and so they're just using the same reporting mechanisms we always use. They're just doing it a little differently.

>> CALLER: Okay.

>> MARY: Thank you, though. I think that was a good clarification to make.

Does anybody else have any questions or comments? Again, press \*2 to raise your hand. And if you are with us on CART you can just type in your question and I will voice it for you.

And while we're kind of waiting, I just was wondering, Tom, you've worked with a lot of farmers through your independent living center. Do you have any ‑‑ without using anybody's information, do you have any kind of your favorite success stories or maybe one of your more creative stories on just how you help that person continue in the field?

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: I can tell you of some of our current problems or issues that we're working on. One of the things that the Vermont AgrAbility Team way back began still shows is a lady with MS that couldn't crawl up into her hay loft any longer. They had a ladder up the side of the barn, and that was my first assessment, my first project with AgrAbility. I knew the lady. I went there. And we worked out a ladder system that came down into her manger area. It was kind of weighted. It came down and she could walk upstairs with handrails and get into her hay and get the stuff down she wanted, and then when she came back down she could raise the thing back up.

That's got a lot of mileage out of what was a simple adaptation. I can tell you now that I'm working with a veteran that is 54 years old. He was homeless and had no connection to the VA. He has diabetes. He had an amputation of the large toe. He came in with no services, no income, and no home to live in.

I am currently hooked up with the VA and looking for SSDI, and it has been a long process, but I feel very good that I'm helping a brother veteran.

So you want me to go on about other things or you want to stop at that?

>> MARY: I think that's great. I do want to pose one more question while we're waiting. First of all, again, folks can press \*2 to raise their hand and join the conversation.

And this is for any of our callers out there in Caller Land or any speakers with us. Does anybody have ‑‑ I would like to call them "pearls of wisdom." So if you could give somebody advice, if they're trying to work with somebody out on a farm to continue doing what they love, what would be your most important piece of advice? And, again, anybody out there press \*2 if you've got some or any of our callers.

How about you, Paul? What is one of your ‑‑ what would you like your "pearl of wisdom" to be while we're coming to a close?

>> PAUL JONES: I think several things are important. One is being aware of the resources that are available. It's not something you need to do alone, and I think one of the most important things is let the farmer know that they don't have to do it alone.

Sometimes hope is the biggest issue. Somebody that is on a farm, for example, becomes injured, as I said, may have absolutely no idea about disability or services. They may just be totally overwhelmed. I think providing them some hope and showing them the toolbox that would give them ideas about, you know, how they could possibly continue when they might think that that's not even within the realm of possibility.

So encouraging the farmers that there are options for even, you know, people with severe disabilities in agriculture, and, you know, being there to support and encourage them.

>> MARY: Thanks, Paul. While we're waiting for others to press \*2 to join the conversation, let's hear from Cindy. What would you say your "pearl of wisdom" is that you want to leave with folks?

>> CINDY CHASTAIN: Well, I think I would ‑‑ there's several. I agree with what Paul said, but also I think it's very important that other family members are involved in the conversation, the initial conversations you have with the farmer or in my case the farmer‑veteran. You're going to find things out from the family members that the veteran or the farmer won't tell you. That you need to know to make their farming experiences better or, you know, being able to adjust to whatever they need to do to be able to continue farming.

And I think it's important that the family members or the caregivers are involved in those discussions.

>> MARY: Thanks, Cindy. And I think, you know, I think you bring up a point of ‑‑ like I said, I grew up on a farm, really small community, and it is ‑‑ you know, if somebody needs something, it's the whole community that really comes together to do it, and so really engaging that community in that support process, and it might be something as simple as making sure the nearest feed store has a ramp or is accessible for everybody.

You know, or just looking out for one another.

I remember one of our neighbors got trampled by his cattle once and my dad went out there and he had to cut down all the fences and everything so that the ambulance could get through.

And so, you know, just ‑‑ you have to bring a whole community together.

So that's great.

All right. I don't see anybody in our queue yet, so why don't we move to Steve. What would you say is your "pearl of wisdom"?

>> STEVE ETHERIDGE: Well, I agree with everything that has been said, and to maybe touch on what Paul said, one of the things that I learned in vocational rehabilitation was the unknown ‑‑ I guess the uncertainty of a new situation or a recent injury or whatever. But that weighs pretty heavily on people's minds. And maybe for me to recognize that and to let them know that we can ‑‑ you know, we can kind of break the unknown down a little bit, and as Paul said, you know, to provide hope in that way.

The other thing that I learned that I think was very important is for the person to understand that I think that they ‑‑ and I do think and I believe ‑‑ that they are expert in regard to their disability and them. That it's not up to me at all to tell them or to make decisions for them but they are the expert and they're going to teach me about their situation or their circumstance and what ‑‑ you know, what they want to do going forward.

And I guess then in addition to that, many times I think you'll ‑‑ particularly as it relates to the farmers with disability and vocational rehabilitation, the culture of agriculture is different than, you know, maybe any other kind of employment, because as Cindy mentioned, the family is going to be involved. It's also weather‑dependent, time‑dependent, as Tom mentioned ‑‑ or Cindy mentioned, I forget which one, but you work until the mission is done or the task is accomplished. You don't ‑‑ you know, you aren't punching a time clock. And basically I met a lot of folks that work construction because they really like construction. Or they worked in manufacturing because that's how they paid their bills and were able to afford, you know, other things they wanted.

But I don't think I ever met a farmer who didn't love farming, didn't do farming because ‑‑ for any other reason than they loved it.

And that's quite different than other occupations in some ways or in many ways. And VR counselors aren't going to necessarily be attuned to that. And so both ‑‑ so I would always encourage, you know, the farmer or the ‑‑ you know, if they're working with AgrAbility or working with another agency, to encourage the VR counselor to be able to come out and actually take a look at what they're ‑‑ you know, what needs to be done. You know, what would make things better, easier, to allow for a deeper understanding. I think of the circumstance. So that's a rather long response to your question, but I'll stop there.

>> MARY: I think it was great. Thank you, Steve. I just want to summarize, because you hit on a lot of great pearls, and I think you're absolutely right. In VR, you know, I think it's great that you understand that the consumer or that person with the disability is the best expert. And for those folks out there working in centers, I think one of the biggest things that we can do to support that person with a disability is to help them understand what it is that they might need or want, because you don't know what you don't know, and then they can really go out there and inform their VR specialist or VR counselor, you know, for example, I talk a lot about my dad, but I worked at a center for a long time and I sent him some ski poles. It was really easy, ski poles, hike poles that I borrowed from our state AP program and he use them when he was walking long distances in between the grain bins and, you know, and the truck, and checking out the different areas. And he just ‑‑ it saved so much on him, and so then, you know, that was something he didn't even think about and he didn't know to think about. So just helping people explore those different options.

And we've got a tiny bit of time left and I'll let you wrap it up, Tom. So first I just want to mention again, please go to our website and evaluate this call. We have great speakers on the line and I'll let Tom finish us out.

>> TOM YOUNKMAN: Okay. Sarah, thank you and I would like to add to Cindy's comment ‑‑ she touched on the family. One of the main things that I find in doing assessments is that the caregiver sometimes needs more care than the actual client because they're really taking the brunt of the farmer not being able to do what he wants and it aggravates them, they're depressed.

So I think that we need address the caregivers as well. And also, you know, we talked about goals. Independent living center, the individual needs a goal, and what that goal is what they want. We're not going to tell them what they want. We'll suggest and whatnot, but they make up their own mind and we go forward and help them achieve that goal.

So that's where I would end it.

>> MARY: Thank you so much. Great! Thank you, everybody, for joining us on our first IL conversation. Tune in next month when we'll talk about veterans, serving those who served us.

I want to say thank you again to the great panel of speakers and have a great rest of your week!

>> Thank you!