

Farmer braids financial resources to ensure his future on the farm

At age 5, Garvin Schaffer knew he wanted to be a farmer. Despite health and market challenges, he has made that dream come true.

Garvin Schaffer, known by his friends as Butch, grew up on Schaffer Farms and began farming at a young age alongside his father.

"Farming was always in my blood; I knew it was what I wanted to spend my life doing," said Garvin.

Garvin never had any interest in being anywhere except the farm, but at his mother's prompting he left the farm for four years to gain a college degree. He quickly returned to the farm and became serious about growing their operation. He and his father worked together milking cows and growing crops.

In the beginning, they farmed 150 acres but over time they increased the size of the farm to 450 acres and began raising replacement heifers as well as growing small grains, cover crops, and straw to diversify the farm.

Garvin began having knee problems at a young age. By the time he left college, he had already undergone several knee surgeries due to injuries. His father also had trouble with his knees so they began making updates to their farm to

accommodate their limitations. They added a milking parlor to reduce strain on their knees and to increase the number of cows they could milk. This was their first step in the journey to creating an accessible farm environment.

In 2010, Garvin's father became ill and the bulk of farm responsibilities shifted to Garvin. He became sole owner and operator in 2013 after his father passed away. Garvin greatly enjoyed working alongside his father.

"Farming just isn't the same without him there. I miss having him with me," he said.

Due to his knee pain and after being diagnosed with bilateral

degenerative joint disease, Garvin had both of his knees replaced in 2017. Though the surgeries were a success, he was left with limited mobility, loss of balance, and back pain. After searching for resources and support, Garvin came across AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians (AgrAbility PA) and reached out for assistance.

In early 2018, AgrAbility PA provided an on-site farm assessment in collaboration with Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). By working with both programs, Garvin was able to implement assistive technology (AT) on his farm that would help him continue farming: a utility vehicle to assist him with mobility around the farm, ergonomic tractor and skid steer seats to provide relief from back pain, and tractor steps to enable him to safely access his tractors.

The modifications were a huge success and allowed Garvin to remain active on his farm. However, he was still relying on hired help to milk his cows. Due to his health and the declining dairy economy, Garvin decided to transition away from dairy farming and move towards raising beef cattle and grain. These two farming operations reduced the need for hired labor and increased Garvin's independence on the farm.

Making these transitions and implementing assistive technology enabled Garvin to continue to do this work on the farm, which is important to him. He loves farming; he loves being outdoors, operating his tractors, planting crops, and the hope



"I am so glad these programs – AgrAbility, PATF, and OVR – are here to help. When you love something so much and face the possibility of not being able to continue, it is well worth making the phone call to see how they can help."

- Garvin Schaffer

Garvin Schaffer continued inside

From the Director: Leading and *Leaning On One Another*



It's fair to say that each and every one of us has had to step up and lead in different ways in recent times:

- ▶ Whether it be on the farm fields, in the dairy barn, or somewhere else across the agricultural sector — maintaining and sustaining our food systems.
- ▶ Whether it be for a co-worker or community member — finding new ways to support each other.
- ▶ Whether it be at home — protecting those that mean the most to us — our family and loved ones.

Through all of it, **agriculture has remained an essential industry** — a crucial component to the success and sustainability of our society as a whole.

AgrAbility PA has led an effort to continue the services and support we provide to farmers and agricultural workers with a disability or health condition:

- ▶ Through phone calls, text messages, and emails.
- ▶ Using FaceTime, Zoom, or other video technology.
- ▶ Conducting safe, on-site farm assessments and evaluations; serving as a key conduit for farmers.

It's amazing to see how each and every one of us can lead and *lean on one another* when a challenge arises. For farmers, rising to a challenge is part of who they are. We are grateful to join you in tackling these challenges.

- Suzanna Windon, Ph.D.
AgrAbility PA Project Director
Assistant Professor of Youth & Adult Leadership, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, Penn State University

Services & Support

for farmers with disabilities or long-term health conditions

- ▶ On-site farm assessments to help identify barriers to successful completion of everyday tasks
- ▶ Identification of safe and appropriate assistive technology or modifications to equipment
- ▶ Peer and caregiver support and resources
- ▶ Access to educational training opportunities
- ▶ Referrals and information about state/local resources and service providers

Garvin Schaffer continued from cover

that comes each spring for a good year. He enjoys the diversity of each day and time alone to think. Switching from dairy to beef greatly decreased his overall stress and it has been a huge benefit for his business as well.

However, Garvin was still having trouble accessing his skid steer – a piece of equipment that he uses to move heavy items such as hay bales, grain, manure, pallets, rocks, etc. Most skid steers are front-entry, which means climbing over the bucket to get inside. Garvin's activity on the farm was impacted daily by the difficulty he had getting in and out of his skid steer. This became even more challenging in muddy, wet, and wintry conditions. In addition, the skid steer he was using did not have a fully-enclosed, climate-controlled cab. The front of the skid steer was completely open to inclement weather. With metal in both knees, Garvin found completing his work almost unbearable on cold, wet windy days.

Garvin reached out again to AgrAbility PA for assistance. AgrAbility PA staff recommended testing out a side-entry skid steer, which would perform the same tasks but is more accessible and has a fully-enclosed cab. Garvin tried out a few side-entry models and he found it much easier to get in and out of the unit. However, the cost was significant and it was not eligible for funding from OVR.

AgrAbility PA recommended contacting the Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF) for financial assistance to purchase a side-entry skid steer. Garvin was unsure what to expect – transitioning the farm from dairy to beef and grain had

impacted his income and credit.

When Garvin began the application process, he was relieved to learn that the PATF staff wanted to work with him to review the big picture: Garvin was working hard to get back on his feet; he had every intention of paying back the loan; and PATF recognized that the skid steer would make a significant difference in his ability to do the work he loves. Ultimately, PATF's Board of Directors agreed to guarantee a low-interest loan so Garvin could buy his skid steer.

"PATF sure helped out! I actually got a letter from [PATF's partner bank] Santander that I had been denied," he explained, "but when the Board guaranteed it, that solidified the loan. And the low interest rate – that was spectacular," said Garvin.

Garvin used the skid steer this summer and fall. He shared that it is much more accessible and it has improved his safety and risk of secondary injury, too. He highly recommends that other farmers try side-entry skid steers if they are having trouble accessing their current equipment.

"I am so glad these programs – AgrAbility, PATF, and OVR – are here to help. When you love something so much and face the possibility of not being able to continue, it is well worth making the phone call to see how they can help. The knowledge AgrAbility PA had about options and assistive technology was very helpful, and I am so thankful for the loan from PATF," said Garvin.

FARM MOBILITY:

Selecting a Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV)

A disability or long-term health condition can greatly impact a farmer's mobility on the farm. There are many types of Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) that can help a farmer regain or maintain their independence.

When investing in a UTV, it is important to select the correct option based on the individual's functional capabilities, farm environment, and farm tasks.

A UTV can be an excellent choice for certain farm environments and tasks, however, there are many things to take into consideration when selecting one.

It is not one-size-fits-all: different types of brands, makes, and models should be considered. Test driving several UTVs prior to purchasing one is highly recommended.

WHEN TESTING AND SELECTING A UTV, CONSIDER:

Cab with Environmental Controls

Do you have a medical condition that causes hypersensitivity to heat and cold? If so, a UTV with a cab, heat, and air conditioning is worth consideration.

Door Handles & Door Hinges

Do you have functional limitations in your hands or upper extremities? Door handles on UTVs range from push button to twist levers. Be sure to select a type that is easy to open. Some UTV doors hinge from the back while others hinge from the front. This makes a difference on how you enter the cab and can impact accessibility.

Seating

Bench, bucket, and split seats all affect access and comfort.

Safety Grab Bar

These bars can assist with access (or hinder) depending on the location of the bars and your mobility.

Operation Controls

Are you able to operate the controls? Will the controls require modification, such as hand controls? Select a model that will require the least amount of modifications. Always follow safety guidelines when operating a UTV. Obtain driver training if needed, especially when modifications are made to the operation controls.

Additional features to consider include

manual or electric dump bed, height of cargo bed, tilt steering wheel, power windshield wiper, cargo bed features, and attachment capabilities or special features, such as a PTO connection.

AgrAbility PA is able to perform an on-site farm assessment and offer assistance in selecting a UTV. AgrAbility PA does not provide direct funding for assistive technology such as a UTV, however, the AgrAbility PA staff can suggest potential funding resources. Farmers with a disability or long-term health condition may be eligible for funding through the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF), or other third-party funding sources.

"It is important to test out multiple UTVs. Many farmers are surprised that they find one model was easier to access or operate over another. It's often the opposite of what they originally thought."

— Abbie Spackman,
AgrAbility PA Project Assistant



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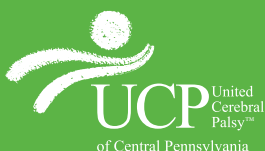
one farm family at a time

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AgrAbility for Pennsylvanians is a state-wide partnership between Penn State Extension and UCP Central PA.



READ ALL ABOUT IT!

AgrAbility PA has added several educational articles written specifically for farmers and agricultural workers with a disability or long-term health condition who are working in production agriculture to the project's website.

Online: agrabilitypa.org/resources/educational-articles



Scan QR code with the camera
on a phone or tablet to
access the articles digitally.



In addition to the article featured in this newsletter on Selecting a UTV, other articles online provide information on:

- Ag Equipment: Access & Modifications
- Cab Cameras
- Dairy Barn Assistive Technology
- Hearing Loss on the Farm

Articles will be added to this webpage throughout the year. To receive print versions of these articles or to receive this content in another form, contact AgrAbility PA.