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| ROUGH EDITED COPY  IL Conversation  Veterans in Agriculture  6/25/14  \* \* \* \* \*  This is being provided in a rough-draft format. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings  \* \* \* \* |

>> Hi, everyone. I'm Elissa Ellis and I'd like to welcome everyone. This IL conversation is presented by the IL net, a national training and technical assistance program of Independent Living Research Utilization and was organized and facilitated by April.

So we're happy you could join us and are looking forward to a lively discussion. We have an hour and a half so we'll start out with an introduction of our speakers, each speaker has 15 to 20 minutes to discuss their topic and we will open it up at the end for Q&A. We will start with Michael O'Gorman then to Paul Jones and finally Will Milzarski.

We want to keep this as conversational as possible and I know questions will come up as we go through this material so we'll open it up for questions at the end. We want to hear from you. A little housekeeping before we start. First, www.april‑rural.org to print documents and links are up. We are providing cart captioning services today and that can be accessed via our website. Just go to www.april‑rural.org and you'll see today's IL conversation on the front page. Notice the highlighted and you'll find a link to cart. You can also send us questions via the chat line on the site. I'd like to ask everyone to put your phones on mute once we begin the presentation. Since this is a bridge line, it's pretty sensitive to any background noise and will even pick up paper shuffling so if you would, please, star 6.

I also want to remind folks that cell phones and speakerphones tend to cause a lot of distortion on the line so if you're using either, please call back in from a land line or make sure to mute your phone when not speaking. I understand this may be an issue for some folks and I completely understand if you do not have access to a land line. Once we get to the Q&A part, I'll try to moderate the discussion but if we could all be as courteous as possible and try not to talk over each other that would be great. We'll try to go one question at a time. Thanks much.

>> Michael has been a leading organic farmer for over 40 years. In 1990‑1995, he served as production manager for TKO farms where he pioneered the large scale production of baby salad greens. In 1996, he became the first farm manager for mission organics, managing the growing for Earthbound farms can label. And in 1998, he became founder and president offing a row productions Dell Cabo where he oversaw 2500 acres of tomatoes, basil and mixed vegetables in Baja, California for the U.S. market. Michael is the executive director of the farmer veteran coalition which has been at the forefront of efforts to connect military veterans with careers in agriculture. FVC honors the farming path of each individual veteran and equally supports employment and self‑employment. “During the first five years, we worked to make farming a visible opportunity for veterans. Now our focus is helping those who have chosen this field to successfully launch their businesses."

Our next presenter is Paul Jones. He is manager of the national AgrAbility project and the Indiana AgrAbility project. USDA funded programs for agricultural workers with disabilities which are administered through the breaking new ground resources center at Purdue University. He has been a member of the Purdue agricultural safety and health program staff since 1998 and has done a significant amount of farm safety work related to old order Anabaptist groups such as the Amish. Paul also managed grants sponsored by the CDC's national institute of occupational safety and health, the Indiana state department of health and NEC foundation of America. In addition to program management, Paul specializes in resource development including print, electronic and audiovisual materials.

Our third presenter is will Milzarski who is officially retiring in August. Currently enlisted in the army. Stateside, he became interested in IL and worked for several years with CILs advocating for regional V.A. office to form partnerships. Bill later returned to military service recently returning from Afghanistan and is currently an infantry officer stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas. I would like to turn it over to Michael O'Gorman to start the call.

>> Thank you APRIL and Elissa for hosting this conversation. I'm the founder. We began this project after two events that we noticed that let me start the project. It was in the McCarthy institute that showed a disproportionate number of fatalities of wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan from service people coming from small, rural communities across the United States. So it really pointed to the fact that our military is now almost 50% rural as compared to only 16% of the population. The second was we did a study, myself with some friends got together and decided we wanted to do something about this. We did a study and found out in 2008 that there were 40,000 organizations in the United States with the name veteran in the title, there to assist veterans but not one helping veteran’s transition into agriculture.

Almost six years later, we have a network that have contacted us from all 50 states, each of the U.S. territories and many actively serving in several parts of the country overseas. We have our national office in California. We have five staff people outside California. Of the 13, 10 of them are veterans. Our effort has paid off in both the raising awareness of the need for support of veterans returning to rural communities. Of the opportunities they have in agriculture and a tremendous ground swell of interest that many have in either returning to the farms they grew up in or grew around. Very happy to see the support we've received from the USDA and the 2014 farm bill established, gives it definition ‑‑ a legal definition of veteran farmer, establishes a veteran agriculture liaison position and has tremendous support throughout a number of programs. And priority for a number of conservation programs and other funding programs. It also earmarks funding for several of the competitive grants that groups go after to support beginning farmers and prioritize those working with veterans.

The services we provide ‑‑ one of our signature projects is a fellowship fund. This is important for this group because this fund is primarily targeted veterans who have come back from their service with what we call a service connected disability. So it could be a visible or invisible wound directly related to the military service. Since April of 2011, we've awarded $400,000 in small grants ranging from $5,000 to $20,000 to these veterans. Some of them with fairly pronounced physical injuries that have actually gone forward and succeeded in farming.

The state of Kentucky included a project under their Kentucky proud label that supports Kentucky farmers and so any veteran in Kentucky was able to ‑‑ and has been able to sign up, 60 of them to use the label home grown by heroes to put on their products that they sell. And we reached an agreement with the state of Kentucky and have a licensing agreement and are able now to license any veteran of any era in all 50 states that farming, ranching or fishing to sell their products as long as they ‑‑ their ‑‑ they served in the military and honorable general discharge and they're 50% owner and operator of their farm or ranch or fishing operation.

So we're really excited about the homegrown by heroes’ campaign. We've had 100. We just launched it nationally a month ago. We already have 100 veterans with representing about $10 million in aggregated annual sales that have signed up to use this label. And about a quarter of them finished the complete process. We also do career development because, as you mentioned, Elissa, we support both employment and understand that most people in agriculture, at least in the household, they combine on‑farm and off‑farm income and that farming may be a secondary part‑time income for many of the disabled veterans, it is an income alongside a disability income that they may be receiving for their injuries.

Four of the people we have working outside of our office are what we called subject matter experts, ones that are young veterans. One is ‑‑ has his degree in food law and we give free legal assistance to any veterans THAT sign up and become a member of FVC. We have a second who is an injured veteran himself from the battle in Iraq. He's a certified financial planner and he helps with business planning for veterans from his home and farm in Nebraska. We have a veteran ‑‑ calls herself a vet squared. She's a doctor of veterinarian medicine. She helps with food safety planning for veterans that come into our program and it is also a service we do for anybody who signs up with homegrown by hero’s label. And the fourth member of the staff from Iowa is also a young attorney and Coast Guard veteran and he helps give advice to veterans on how to access the USDA benefits that are available. FVC feels very strongly about collaboration.

We've had tremendous partnership with AgrAbility and all of the members of the disability service community including APRIL and Goodwill and Easter Seals and some of the funders and that's been a very, very important part for us, that collaboration to help reach and get the best benefits for any of the disabled veterans we work with. We're also forming chapters around the country. We have ‑‑ we're trying to hold back the floodgates because we get a lot of inquiries and we actually have plans as early as the end of this week, we'll have our template for organizing chapters in different states. It's really important to us that each of these chapters has, as one of their keyboard members and founders, someone from the disability community because of the large number of veterans that are disabled.

One final thing I will mention is that we do have plans. We've actually finalized the plans, the initial plans for it. We got some of the initial ‑‑ very initial funding that we are going to hold the first national conference for veterans in agriculture service providers in Des Moines, Iowa, at Drake University in partnership with the agricultural law center at Drake University. It is going to be after elections and before Thanksgiving so the dates are November 13‑15. And we welcome everybody to stay in touch with us and look forward to your participation in that event. So other than that, I could just give a little anecdote that unlike most traditional ‑‑ that have been helping veterans ‑‑ helping farmers who become disabled through the life‑span of their career, we're working to help veterans who are coming into agriculture already with a disability. And in many cases, seeing agriculture as part of their ‑‑ part of what heals both their mind and their body and their soul and in many cases, their family. That has been an unbelievably rewarding experience for me to get to participate and work with these young men and women. So thank you.

>> Take it away, Paul.

>> Okay. Thank you. Again, I'm Paul Jones, national AgrAbility project. We're headquartered here at Purdue University. First, I want to express our thanks from AgrAbility to Michael and the coalition for all of their work and for their willingness to partner with groups like us. We've really benefited from a lot of the things that Michael and staff have done and we look forward to continuing to collaborate. If fact, I'll discuss a position that we're going to hopefully staff here soon. The farmer veteran coalition is assisting with also.

In general, I wanted to share just a little general information at the beginning about what AgrAbility is and what AgrAbility does. I participated in one of these IL conversations before just in terms of AgrAbility itself but I realized not everybody may have participated in that and you may not be familiar.

So just a little bit of background on what AgrAbility is and does and then some more specific information about some of the services and resources that we specifically have focused on veterans. So our mission at AgrAbility is to focus on disability issues in agriculture and just in that one statement, we've got a couple of terms that are really begging for some definition because both the term disability and the term agriculture represent very wide continuums in terms of what's included.

So in terms of disability, obviously we deal with things like spinal cord injuries around amputations that are more visible types of visibilities. But if we look at our statistics, some of the things we deal most with are issues like arthritis and problems that people have in agriculture. Some of those may not rise to the level of what the ADA considers a disability but still things that can limit somebody's ability to work especially in agriculture when it is so physically demanding. In fact our most recent publication deals with back health in agriculture and has proven to be fairly popular already. So not only visible disabilities but also things like chronic diseases, multiple sclerosis, heart issues and behavioral and mental health issues also.

In the more distant past, we focused on issues but in recent years, we've recognized to a greater degree, the importance of issues like post‑traumatic stress disorder and other mental and behavioral health issues. We're learning in that area. We're expanding out in into those areas, too. So that's something we're going to continue to work on. So not only is disability on a wide continuum but agriculture also. Traditional agriculture, if you said farming to somebody, they might think of row crops, corn, soybeans, wheat, or livestock. Somebody raising ‑‑ ranching or something like that. If we look at more recent trends, we've got things like a local food movement, organic produce, smaller scale agriculture, hydroponics which is essentially ‑‑ growing plants without soil. Aquaculture, raising fish. Aquaponics, a combination of raising plants and fish together. A lot of niche markets, specialty livestock. Things like bee keeping all fall within the agriculture continuum. So we have to connect ‑‑ keep abreast ourselves of some of the new trends and some of these are possibly more suited for veterans or people that are not entrenched in agriculture or have a strong family background or a strong financial stake in agriculture with a lot of land, a lot of these can be smaller enterprises where you can have a couple of acres. Or no land at all. You can use these inside a barn or garage or facility.

A little history on AgrAbility, we started in the 1990 farm bill with the authorization and then funds came in 1991. Originally eight projects and now we have 20 projects, funded projects, I should say, covering 22 states. We have some affiliate projects which were previously funded but are not any longer but still provide some services. And we had projects in existence even before AgrAbility officially started in states like Vermont, Indiana, and Iowa. So some of those go back to the '60s. Our program here at Purdue started in the late '70s. The services we provide, the services come at the state and local levels. And I notice that we had at least two people from AgrAbility, Tom Hoffman and Kenny Smith from Vermont on, so perhaps they might be able to share some during our discussion period about what they do and in general and specifically related to veterans. But the state projects do provide the direct services to farmers, ranchers, other agricultural workers, veterans, they go out on the farms, they talk about what issues need to be dealt with, barriers.

What kinds of technologies are needed? At the national level, we support the state projects and we also provide some limited services to consumers that are in states that don't have AgrAbility projects. So some of the resources we provide at the national level, a lot of those are available on our website which is www.agrAbility.org. So if you're not familiar with that site, I would recommend you take a little tour. And one of the things we focused on heavily in the past and continue to focus on is Assistive Technology. We realize that for people with physical impairments and other impairments, that sometimes it's just the right tool that can make the job easier, even possible at all. So our assistive technology database called the toolbox has over 1,000 products that can assist somebody with a disability in agriculture.

So I recommend taking ‑‑ again taking a little look at that. Seeing what's available so you can refer your own consumers to that. We produce publications. I mention impairment resource. We do webinars on about a two‑month period, every two months. The one that's scheduled for tomorrow is very relevant to our topic today. It's titled suicide awareness with a focus on veterans and rural Americans. If you want to participate in that, today is essentially the last day. The webinar is tomorrow afternoon at 2:00 eastern time. If you go to our website, AgrAbility.org and go to the latest news module at the top right, for stories on the webinar, if you click on that and follow the link, you can get to the registration form. Again, you'll need to do that today. We do have quite a good registration list at this point. So we're encouraged by that and also you know, it just speaks to the topic that this is something that it's important to a lot of people.

We do a lot of conferences and workshops with AgrAbility and we've had speakers like Michael O'Gorman and Billy Altom from APRIL. Both are on our advisory team. So we get together once a year to talk face to face and do a lot of networking with Billy and other groups, including the Centers for Independent Living. So moving on just to some of the specific veterans‑related services that we provide in AgrAbility, historically and speaking probably just from the Indiana perspective, in the more distant past, veteran status was not focused on heavily. I think there probably weren't as many veterans in earlier days that were interested in the beginning farmer aspect of agriculture and a lot of veterans we dealt with were coming out of the Vietnam era or even the Korean War era.

So I think the culture of the time probably did not lend itself to identifying as a veteran probably as closely as it does today. I think there's a lot greater focus on veteran's issues in the general public and the greater sense of public support, combined with organizations like Michael's, Farmer Veteran Coalition and others around the country that are recognizing the importance of agriculture for veterans. So this is becoming an increasingly important topic for us at AgrAbility. And just looking at some of the barriers, I think that to those that are interested, that are veterans, the signature disability of the current conflicts are typically identified as post‑traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. And there are definitely potential benefits for those ‑‑ for those types of disabilities for working in agriculture. There can be a potential. There is also kind of a mission mindset between agriculture and the military and I think that can be something that has good crossover effect or can at least. The structure of agriculture is not as rigid as many vocations which can be a benefit and I think the flip side of that is that there is uncertainty with agriculture. So to benefit, that's not always the case. Greater flexibility is not only a benefit that can be a problem and there's also of course uncertainty about things like income. Other issues, obviously physical ‑‑ veterans, the visible disabilities are important in addition to the invisible ones like post‑traumatic stress and TBI.

We're seeing a greater percentage of service members surviving catastrophic injury than in the past. So things like spinal cord injuries, amputations. So even things like arthritis are issues with problems with carrying heavy loads and combat situations. So those issues are still important. Some of the barriers in terms of agriculture that I see veterans needing to face which are not unusual for anybody that is interested in farming is funding and Michael mentioned his fellowship fund which is definitely something that's needed. Because if you know anything about agriculture and have heard anything about just land prices themselves, they're fairly astronomical in many areas. You add on top of that equipment, depending on what scale of agriculture you're talking about and it can be a fairly insurmountable financial issue. So that's something that we try to help with. In terms of pointing people to resources that are available. AgrAbility cannot provide direct funding or equipment but we keep abreast of beginning farmer programs, some of the farmer service agency programs that are available to help new farmers or existing farmers.

The knowledge barrier can be important, too, in terms of not only production, techniques, but I think also expectations. I think some people come into the agriculture thinking it's kind of an idyllic situation and it can be, as I said, a beneficial environment for many people and obviously something that a lot of people really love. But if you're not prepared for, you know, some of the issues, some of the extraordinarily long hours and difficult working conditions, I think that's something that is a barrier also, the need to be aware of. Again, some of the specific services that we provided up to date, webinar not only tomorrow but we've gotten it archived on veterans and agriculture and military 101. So if that's something you would like to learn more about, you can go to our website again and click on the online training and the archived webinars link. And that was held about two years ago. But some of that information, I think, would be very relevant to today.

We've had community of interest conference calls on things like traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury and post‑traumatic stress disorder archived on our website. We've held conferences specifically for veterans and professionals, working with veterans. Our national workshop has had tracks specifically related to veterans and speakers like Michael and Josh spoke at our most recent conference and a military veteran with significant disabilities. Also the community spokesperson for the Indianapolis Colts.

I would just mention that our next national workshop for AgrAbility is in Rochester, New York, next fall, APRIL 13‑16. So we again intend to have some veteran’s topics at that workshop. We participated in Michael's Farmer Veteran Coalition workshops on empowering women veterans which have been excellent. I did not attend myself but from the staff's perspective, they were very beneficial. I will, again ‑‑ I mentioned before, a job opening. We're trying to fill a position for somebody to be our farmer veteran AgrAbility outreach coordinator. We've had this position open for several months. We do want to get a veteran. And it would be somebody that's interested in both veteran's issues and agriculture. We would have them be doing expanded outreach, some more intense assistance to our state projects to help them get their veterans services up and running or improved. And also, you know, provide ‑‑ public awareness events that relate to veterans issues. So anybody that's possibly interested in that, my e‑mail is Pjones@purdue.edu. I would be happy to discuss that. One other program I would mention that we're involved with is the returning veterans to agriculture program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And the website for that is RV2A.org. It stands for returning veterans to agriculture and that includes a variety of resources that would be good for anybody interested in beginning farming, especially veterans. In addition, of course, to Michael's Farmer Veteran Coalition site which has a wealth of excellent resources. I was just looking on the farmer veteran coalition site prior to this call and under their resource page and their education and training opportunities, there are just some really excellent programs listed there that if you're interested in more education and training, that's just a great place to look. So I think I'll end for now. And again, I would be glad to answer any questions related to this. Also welcoming any comments from our state AgrAbility project. So I will turn it back over to Elissa.

>> Okay. We are going to ‑‑ are there any questions at this point? Very briefly before we move on to Will Milzarski. Okay. Hearing none, take it away, Will.

>> Thank you very much. Good afternoon, everybody. As the introduction was going through, I had the privilege to come back on active duty and to be able to serve with my children. We all went through Afghanistan. I didn't serve with them but alongside them. I had been working with inn the IL field for 20 some odd years now. I got back on active duty and an infantry officer is a long story and generally longer when I tell it. However, today I'm here. I'm going to be speaking about some of the programs that are there for people coming out of the service as well as some of the programs that are out there with the V.A. and such.

Like what Michael was saying earlier, many are from rural areas. Farming is in the blood of many. Out of that, very timely right now, touch on this as well, PTSD and TBI is a huge issue for a lot of folks and for a lot of people with PTSD, the idea of being out in a rural community away from the hustle and bustle is just plain therapeutic. And where that, I'm going to be going into the different ‑‑ the transition assistance that all of the military service ‑‑ authorize under the transition assistance program. A few years ago, congress and such, I'm going to say servicemen. It allows them to take ‑‑ before they get out of the military. Of some these classes are what are V.A. benefits and how do you get a home loan. Some of the big stuff it talks about is the programs that are out there to help folks start small businesses and things along that line.

The small business administration has a large part ‑‑ cap program and they'll go through and talk to the service members and such and tell them about how they can create a business plan and who to talk to for loans. They don't give out the loans themselves, however they'll take the service members through the program and basically hold their hand and mentor them through the program, show them exactly what needs to be done. Additionally, there is a program called boots to business. Through Syracuse University, it is an online course. A college class to help start small business.

I know one soldier here at Fort Riley who has actually bought himself a 40 acre farm not far from here and he's going to the small business administration to get those loans. And he's programmed to do a business plan. He talked to banks. A resource to work. He got funded for it. Now addition to that, the transition assistance program talks about the e-benefits program. If you don't know about the e-benefits program, it is a clearing house for veterans, but it also leads to other places like USDA and such. It also will link you to employment sites and such. It will also talk about the state employment agencies and funding and such. In addition to that, the USDA will assist with home loan guarantees. I can tell you for sure ‑‑ a farm up in Michigan right now, going through this program. And what this will do is eliminate closing costs to certain veterans and such and money down and such. This allows from a business standpoint for farms, over here at Fort Riley, he was able to get a V.A. loan on that, no money down for the house and because he has service connected disability, he was able to have no funding fees. Then he had more capital to turn into his business. That might not seem like much but when you're starting out with nothing, even a little bit can matter a whole lot.

Now going on to the G.I. bill, post‑9‑11 bill. They're here to help service members go to college and such once they're out of the service. Now what this also does, it allows for other things like there is a farm co‑op that is available as well that you can use through the post‑9‑11 G.I. bill. To learn how to work the farm. Do a mentorship‑type thing. The V.A. will actually pay them on top of whatever they get paid through the farmer to go out there and work on the farm and learn how to be more efficient at it before they apply it to their own small business type thing. What this generally means, four year degree for services. What this does, it will pay up to $72,000 for private schools.

My son Eric just got accepted to a school in California for like $17,000 a year and the V.A. paid for all of it. He's so happy to be able to say that. The G.I. bill will sit there and go through and keeps you ‑‑ I know ‑‑ Michigan State University has a huge program trying to get veterans in there to do the farming things. I know Kansas State University does it as well. They're very agriculturally related, to get members to apply and use their G.I. bill for that. In addition to this, if they're severely disabled, can transfer benefits to someone else. For instance, if I no longer could use my benefits, I could transfer to my wife. She could use the full advantage of that four‑year degree along those lines. Another part of the V.A. is the vocational rehab employment. This is for any service member who has a greater than 20% service disability. This will tie in as well to the total amount of education that the service member is authorized through the G.I. bills. But what this can mean is more hands on training and expert assistance through rehab counselors going through and finding the right jobs and going through and getting the right training or mentorship and just a variety of services that are out there to assist. Now, I'm coming up to the end of what I was going to be covering here. I know there are probably a lot of questions.

One thing that I want to stress is that ‑‑ the registry. It is off‑topic. For all of us Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. It falls under something similar to Vietnam Agent Orange program. A lot goes to certain chemicals and such. I would highly encourage you to put this out to your boards and get this broadcast through ‑‑ through your membership. With that, I will turn it back over. Thank you.

>> Okay. Thank you, guys, so much. Bill, really quick ‑‑ Will, really quickly, if you will send me something on what you were just talking about regarding the Agent Orange. If you can send that to me, I'll get it out to the APRIL listserve.

>> Yep.

>> Okay. I will open it up for questions. Does anybody have any questions? Remember to take your phone off mute.

>> Good afternoon. This is Kenny Smith from Vermont. Hello?

>> Yes, go ahead.

>> Yes, good afternoon. Michael, Paul, and Will, thank you for your presentation. We were fortunate ‑‑ myself and Tom Youngkin here in the Vermont AgrAbility office, we are a part of the Vermont Center for Independent Living and it's already within our protocol to work with veterans. But we were really inspired at the national AgrAbility training workshop to meet Michael and get fired up about helping veterans. We've already taken action here in Vermont. And are working with Michelle from the farmer veteran coalition and I just wanted to say we're well on our way to making the moves to form a chapter. And it's been very, very rewarding to pull folks together for this cause.

>> Kenny, this is Michael here. I've been following your progress. Also got your own application for homegrown by heroes. We're really excited. Vermont is one of those states where a lot of ‑‑ it is affordable. Some of the types of farming don't need a huge amount of land. We're really excited.

>> Yes, thank you, Michael. We're fortunate in Vermont with our size that we do have a close‑knit farming community. When I first approached this, I felt somewhat inadequate compared to my farming Brethren out there with acres and acres. I'm just a small scale farmer trying to do a homestead thing. And I also felt a bit uncomfortable about the homegrown by hero’s label. Not having been an infantry man who served in deployment, I felt a little uncomfortable but then I decided it was best to support the label for those brothers and sisters of mine in the military who have served in deployment. We hear that even from people who serve. Some people are hesitant about the label when we explain that this is ‑‑ the wording of the label makes it very clear and understandable, the market surveys have shown that it's the most easily‑recognized wording for someone to know that this is about veterans and supporting those that served. At the very least, took a number of years out of normal career development in agriculture, getting started early and is a big blessing. This is a way to equalize the field a little bit.

>> Yes. I just wanted to add that it doesn't take a whole lot for those folks out there. We started our outreach efforts with just a little bit of research and then some outreach by e‑mail and it doesn't take long to get folks inspired to do this. I just wanted to share that. We've got a massive outpouring of interest here in Vermont now for both the farmer veteran coalition and homegrown by heroes. Thanks a lot for hearing from me.

>> Thank you, Kenny.

>> Okay. Do we have any other questions?

>> This is Paul Jones again. I just wanted to point something out that came to mind when Kenny was talking. When I was describing what AgrAbility is, I didn't mention that natural connection between the independent living centers and AgrAbility because every one of the grants requires a partnership between the university and the state and at least one nonprofit disability services‑related organization.

Some states like Vermont, center for independent living. In fact, several of the states have formal subcontracts with their Centers for Independent Living as partners on the AgrAbility project. I encourage you if you're a CIL and you're interested in this topic, make sure you see who is the AgrAbility project in your state and you might be able to form a formal relationship with that group and you know, that would, I think, definitely enhance your ability to serve veterans as well as other people in agriculture. If they don't have an AgrAbility project in your state, that would be an excellent opportunity to express your interest to somebody in a land grant university, that they should be getting out there and putting in a proposal and possibly including you as a subcontractor on that.

>> Great follow‑up, Paul. Thank you. Okay. Do we have ‑‑ are there any other questions out there? We have a little bit of time left. So we want to make sure everyone's questions are addressed. So now is the time to ask. Or comment. If you have something you want to add to the discussion, please do so. I did not get any questions through the cart link. So I just want to make sure I haven't missed anybody. I don't want to end early and have lost some folks. Okay. Do any ‑‑ Michael, Paul or Will, do you have anything else you want to add.

>> Yeah, I'll make a few comments, Elissa.

>> Okay.

>> One of the things I think is most important that we do and we can help, any of your organizations that are approached by veterans that want to go into agriculture, you know, look at us as a partner. Of our staff, I'm the only one with a life‑long career in agriculture. But you won't find many nonprofits run by anybody with my level of experience. But we also have a lot of advisors and partners in the agriculture community. Farm Bureau, National Farm Bureau, National Farm Bureau Federation, the farm credit services, and the national farmers union are the three giants in ‑‑ board of director of the Montana independent living.

In the agriculture world, we can match them with someone who is looking at the agriculture they're looking at. Some of the disabilities we've seen ‑‑ less interest in interacting. I'm thinking of a veteran on a farm recently who had a serious injury to his head and a pretty large metal plate in over part of his head and a tracheotomy from the lifesaving service that the medics arrived. Just wasn't comfortable going out. Wanted to do something on a pretty small forum. He is fine not going into town. A lot of the disabilities have to do around personal choice where someone is feeling comfortable. Some of the veterans have income from their disabilities that don't need a job but they personally require a need ‑‑ need something to contribute to serve and contribute to be productive.

>> Okay. Are you ‑‑ are any of you aware of any businesses that retrofit existing farm equipment.

>> We have one veteran we worked with. A double amputee. He lost his right leg and right arm. Most tractors have both the ‑‑ both the foot and ‑‑ controls are all right‑handed. John Deere came in and retrofitted at no cost to him, his tractor. So we're finding that, you know, the agricultural community is interested in helping.

>> Wonderful.

>> And there are specific company’s ‑‑ I think probably a leading company for assistive technology related to large farm equipment is here in Indiana. Life Essentials. And they produce a number of different types of lifts. Get somebody into a tractor that has a mobility impairment. This also do land controls for those who can't use lower limbs to operate foot pedals and that type of things and a different variety of assistive devices including all‑terrain scooters. Again, I would ‑‑ if somebody is interested in that whole topic, I would refer them back to our toolbox assistive database. Categories relate to the different types of equipment. Not only tractors but utility vehicles like John Deere gators and all‑terrain vehicles and skid steer loaders. So there's information not only on the particular devices but on companies that would provide some kind of assistive device or adaptation to making those more accessible to people with disabilities. Also any time there is a question about adapting equipment, we would be glad to talk to you about that. We've got an 800 number. 1‑800‑825‑4264. That is answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by somebody. So that's another resource you might make note of.

>> Definitely. Go ahead.

>> If you wanted to say something else on that, please do.

>> I was just going to say I will put together ‑‑ you know, a fact sheet with all of the various websites and organizations that have been mentioned today and put it on the APRIL website so folks have something that they can put their hands on and get to these places quickly.

>> That would be great.

>> Go ahead.

>> The other thing I wanted to touch on was Michael's comment related to the importance of collaborative relationships with other organizations. I think that's a key to what we do in AgrAbility and also at the veteran coalition, just collaborating because I think we realize none of us have all the information or resources to help everybody's issues. So networking, any way you can network with us, with your AgrAbility projects or farmer's coalition or some of the other groups, we're all about that. We would encourage any kinds of partnerships or collaborative relationships like that. So feel free to contact us on issues like that also.

>> Wonderful. Okay. Anybody else have any questions.

>> This is Kenny Smith from Vermont AgrAbility, the Vermont center for independent living and I'll jump back in again. On that same line of thinking, I just wanted to mention we didn't have a blueprint when we started outreach. We have Phil from Independence*First* in Milwaukee. We had guidelines and we had the guidance of Michelle and the former veteran coalition but really we just went about picking out what seemed the most relevant agencies and I just wanted to say on that note that yes, the USDA has been very receptive and very willing partner. But we had really a great accommodation and posting of our event that we put together sponsored by the Vermont Center for Independent Living and Vermont AgrAbility.

We call it the first Vermont farmer veteran forum. And it is mentioned the Department of Veteran’s Affairs in White River Junction, Vermont, really went out of their way to accommodate us. I think it's worth mentioning also that this is probably a good time to, as we focus on these collaborative relationships, it is a good time to mend fences and you know, try to take a fresh, new positive outlook to this. The V.A.'s getting beat up in the press. It could happen to any of us and I think it is a good time to take a first look at the V.A. They seem a really willing partner here in Vermont and we're looking forward to our collaboration with them.

We also have excellent support from the Vermont farm service and the small business administration, the Vermont Department of Labor. And interest from Voc. Rehab as well. There are any number of willing partners out there. We'll be glad to share our experience with other folks as well who may want to contact us. Thanks a lot.

>> Thanks, Kenny. I appreciate that. Okay. Anybody we missed? Now is the time. It doesn't have to be a question. If you have an experience with farming or veterans and you want to share it with us, please do so. Okay. Well, hearing no one, it is 3:00. So we are short of our 3:30. 3:00 my time. I'm sorry. Does anyone have anything to add before I do my closing notes? Okay. I'm sorry, go ahead.

>> Will the call be archived?

>> Yes. It will be. The cart transcription will be on the APRIL website as well as the audio recording.

>> Great.

>> All right. I would like to thank you all for being here today. Thanks, too, to our cart folks and our friends at SKIL in Kansas for recording our call. Again, I'd like to invite you to visit the APRIL website where you'll find the documents discussed today and an archived copy plus a transcript of the presentations. Just go to www.APRIL‑rural.org and look for IL conversations. If you have any questions about today's discussion, you can reach me at april‑elissa@sbcglobal.net. This IL conversation is presented by the IL‑net which is operated by the Independent Living Research Utilization program and TIRR Memorial Hermann in partnership with the APRIL and NCIL. Support for the presentation was provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration. No official endorsement of the Department of Ed. should be inferred. Again, thanks, everybody! Bye‑bye.