

Bob's Biddies Hatchery

AgrAbility Georgia Offers Assistance and Hope for Farm Workers With Disabilities

E. WAYNE McDANIEL
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What if you were a farmer, rancher, farm worker or farm family member afflicted with a disability? What would you do? Give up? Not by a long shot! You would exhibit the same grit and determination for which farmers have always been noted. You would pick yourself up, square your shoulders and get back to work. But hold on—there's help waiting to assist you in doing just that.

The program is called AgrAbility Georgia. Support for AgrAbility comes from the federal government through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and administered by the University of Georgia from offices in Athens and Tifton. It offers, among other things, help in identifying assistive technology solutions such as tractor lifts, hand controls and customized farm modifications to make farming easier; a business plan to stabilize and grow your business; and a wide variety of other resources, including training, classes and workshops. Help is even available in the form of volunteer projects. It is a partnership of many non-profit disability organizations.

Some of the serious health problems that qualify farmers and ranchers for the program include back pain, cancer, cerebral palsy and diabetes, to name a few. Just about anything that prevents you from performing at your highest level qualifies you for help.

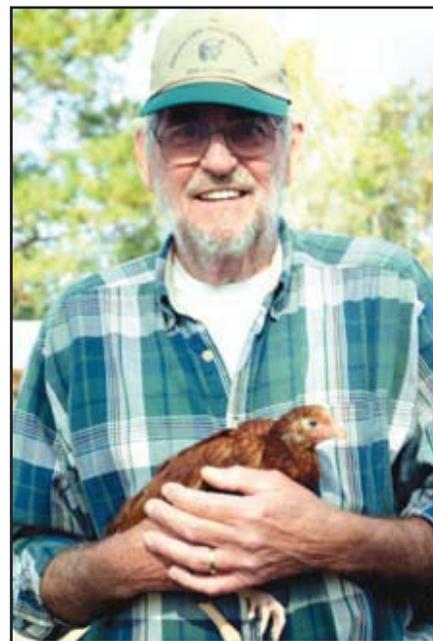
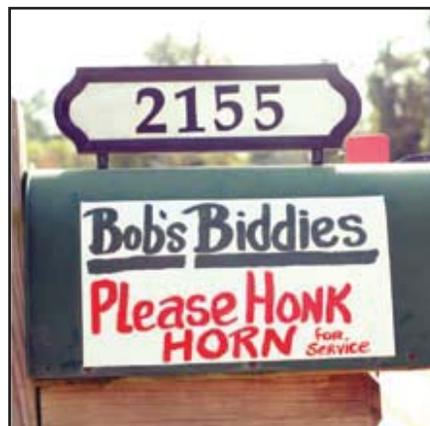
According to the Department of Labor, about 288,000 individuals engaged

in production agriculture nationwide experience physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities that affect how they perform one or more essential work tasks. In Georgia, the number of agricultural workers who have disabilities is estimated at approximately 30,000. Of these, about 5,000 are already clients of AgrAbility in Georgia.

Individuals eligible for AgrAbility services include farmers, ranchers, farm workers or family members that are employed in production agriculture and have any permanent type of disability. The AgrAbility program is about serving people, and here is one of their stories:

Bob Berry, Ray City, Georgia

Bob loves chickens, and always has. He likes to tell visitors to his Ray City hatchery that, when he was a child, his family always raised chickens, anywhere from three birds to several hundred. One day, while visiting a feed store to pick up poultry supplies, young Bob spied an incubator. It was love at first sight. He bought the egg-hatching apparatus and was soon incubating his own chicks. A small business, "Bob's Biddies Hatchery," was soon born.



Bob Berry's lifelong love of chickens led to his hatchery business, known as Bob's Biddies in Ray City, Georgia.

"The rest, as they say, is history. I began hatching my chicks and looking for customers," says Bob.

Bob was soon selling chicks in modest numbers and planning to grow his hobby into a lifetime business. In the early 1980s, however, something happened that threatened his business, and forever changed his life.

Bob was diagnosed with glaucoma, a debilitating eye disease often known as "the silent sight stealer." Once it damages the optic nerve, sight can never be restored. He is now blind in one eye.

Undaunted, Bob was determined to continue his business. With his wife Diane's help, he was able to care for and deliver his chicks. The other alternative was for customers to drive to the little hatchery and pick up their chicks. The Berrys decided that, to grow their business they needed to ship their chicks directly to their customers.

"In order to do that," says Bob, "we needed to be certified by the NPIP." The National Poultry Improvement Program was established in 1935 to keep poultry free from disease nationwide.

A visiting NPIP inspector told Bob that his operation would need to be upgraded before he could be approved to ship his chicks by mail. Bob contacted the Georgia Department of Labor Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program in Valdosta. VR's goal is to help people with disabilities become fully productive in



Rhode Island Reds, Dominique, Buff Orpington and Delaware are some of the chicken breeds available from Bob's Biddies.

their chosen farm endeavors. Bob went to the VR office and met rehabilitation counselor Kim Wagner, whom he now thinks of as his guardian angel. VR also came to Bob's hatchery. They stated that in order to get financial aid to upgrade and meet NPIP standards, Bob would need a business plan. Wagner advised him to contact AgrAbility. There he was assisted by Glen Rains, AgrAbility program director, and his staff, and soon Bob had his business plan. He was approved and in business. "I'm very grateful to both VR and AgrAbility for their help," says Bob. "They were both just great!"

Bob still loves his chickens. In particular, he likes Rhode Island Reds, true Dominiques and Buff Orpingtons. He plans to add several more heritage breeds soon. Bob's chicks are available

year round, and he and Diane ship to just about anywhere in the country.

If you do go to Bob's Ray City hatchery, you will see a sign at the front gate that says "Bob's Biddies—Please Honk Horn for Service." You won't need to honk, however. You'll soon be greeted by two barking door bells, with Bob right behind.

If you would like a tour of Bob's Biddies Hatchery, just give Bob a call at 229-455-6437, e-mail him at bobsbiddies@live.com, or see his breeder listing under Dominiques on page 80.

E. Wayne McDaniel, of Gainesville, is a journalist, historian and teacher. He writes and teaches history and creative writing in the continuing education departments of several area universities.

If you are interested in obtaining AgrAbility assistance, find out more by calling AgrAbility at 706-542-0304 or toll-free at 877-524-6264, or sign on to the program's website at www.farmagain.com. The National AgrAbility Project also has a website at www.agrability.org.



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