

Washington State AgrAbility Project: Building a New Extension Program During COVID-19



Skagit
County

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EXTENSION

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Affiliated with the National AgrAbility Project, the USDA-funded Washington State AgrAbility Project (WSAP) serves farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers throughout the state inhibited by injury, illness, or disability. The program helps ease the return to work and daily living activities and reduce the rate of secondary injury. In early 2020 WSAP was developing assistive technology (AT) lending library kits while delivering in-person trainings and demonstrations. With the emergence of COVID-19, in-person outreach was severely limited. Initially, we intended to embed farm stress and behavioral health programming into WSAP outreach. However, with an elevated focus on behavioral health and excessive stress brought on by the pandemic, farmers and stakeholders were eager for behavioral health messaging which then opened the door for WSAP to present to more audiences. As demonstrated in American Farm Bureau Federation polls, prior to the pandemic behavioral health and access to services were known issues in rural areas and among farmers and farmworkers.¹ According to a December 2020 poll, “Farmers and farmworkers were 10% more likely than rural adults as a whole to have experienced feeling nervous, anxious or on edge during the pandemic (65% vs. 55%).”² Given the difficulty of developing an outreach-based program under the circumstances of COVID-19, WSAP’s resiliency relied on a diversified and well-connected Extension system and seizing relevant opportunities to collaborate.

1. Morning Consult. (2019, April 16). “American Farm Bureau Federation Rural Stress Polling Presentation.” [PowerPoint Presentation]. https://www.fb.org/files/AFBF_Rural_Stress_Polling_Presentation_04.16.19.pdf

2. Morning Consult. (December 2020). “Impacts of COVID-19 on Rural Mental Health.” [PowerPoint Presentation]. https://www.fb.org/files/Impacts_of_COVID-19_on_Rural_Mental_Health_1.6.21.pdf



WSAP AT Demonstration, Growing Vets farm, Lynden, WA



Example of First Aid Kit with Wallet Card

Multi-Modal AT Trainings/Workshops:

- “Simple Tools and Modifications for Farmers and Gardeners”
- “Assistive Technology for Working Farmers”
- “Aching Hands and Stomped-on Feet”
- “Preventing Injury”

Home/Worksite Assessments & AT Lending Library:

- Offer home/worksite assessments for injured farmers (following social distancing guidelines) and work with equipment manufacturers and agencies to connect clients with appropriate AT and services
- Developed an AT Lending Library for distribution throughout state: <https://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/agrability/lending-library/>. AT is tailored to particular types of injuries/ailments i.e. hearing and vision loss, lower back pain, arthritis and grip issues, etc.

WA Farm Bureau Collaboration

- Participated in WA Farm Bureau COVID-19 PPE giveaways
- Distributed bilingual Spanish-English information on WSAP and approx. 500 First-Aid kits including suicide prevention wallet cards to farmers and farmworkers from counties across the state
- Hosted virtual QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) for Farmers and Ranchers suicide prevention trainings for Farm Bureau members and staff
- Presented program to County Farm Bureaus in Safety & Claims division; Reach: 140+



Washington Assistive Technology Act Program
Technology for Independence

