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DWD Sec. Newson: Vocational Rehabilitation Partnership Keeps Farmers Working, Supports Wisconsin's Agricultural Heritage

FARM Program an example of strong return on investment for DWD's Vocational Rehabilitation system

MADISON – Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson today reiterated the benefit of Wisconsin's Farm Assessment and Rehabilitation Methods (FARM) Program as one way in which DWD and its workforce partners are promoting successful employment outcomes for Wisconsinites.

"As we celebrate June as Dairy Month in Wisconsin, we stand with the many dairy farmers and other agriculture workers who have overcome employment barriers due to disability and successfully stayed on the farm thanks to the FARM Program," Secretary Newson said. "This initiative is reflective of the innovative collaborations we have in Wisconsin to support workers and honor our state's strong farming heritage."

The FARM Program is affiliated with AgrAbility, a collaboration between the University of Wisconsin-Extension and Easter Seals Wisconsin to determine the assistance farmers with disabilities need to continue their work, such as mobility aids or equipment to complete physically strenuous work. Under the FARM Program, DWD's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) connects participating farmers with services, including funds to purchase assistive technology and rehabilitative services based on the AgrAbility assessments. This partnership provided assistive technology to 77 farmers in federal fiscal year 2011 alone.

The program also has the support of Wisconsin's Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Referrals are made to AgrAbility and the FARM program when callers to DATCP's Wisconsin Farm Center identify physical limitations that have become an obstacle to continuing their farm operation.

"We appreciate the efforts and achievements that this partnership provides to farmers," said DATCP Secretary Ben Brancel. "Farmers who find themselves disabled can utilize this service to get back to work and contribute in supporting themselves, their family and community."

DWD Secretary Newson cited the FARM Program is one way DVR investments are yielding successful outcomes for Wisconsinites. DVR's budget is 78.7% federal funded with a 21.3% state match required for each federal dollar allotted to Wisconsin, and there are several indicators of the positive return on the state's investment:

- In the past 3 federal fiscal years, more than \$119 million in DVR purchase of employment plan services and products were invested in Wisconsin's economy, with an impact of over 1,500 jobs. Of these totals, nearly \$93 million were federal funds drawn down by state match with an economic impact of 1,240 jobs.
- Taxable earnings by DVR consumers who completed employment plans, when divided by the amount of federal and state funds invested in their DVR services, yielded a 197% return on investment in federal fiscal year 2011. When the state match is broken out, the ratio is \$8 in return for each \$1 in state revenue invested. One study suggested the return on investment for that \$1 grows to an \$18 yield in the third year.

For more information: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/>

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