

## PLACES TO TURN TO FOR TIPS ON MODIFYING EQUIPMENT, MACHINERY

# Help For Handicapped Farmers and Ranchers

by Armin Hecht

Reg Urbanowski, an occupational therapist from Vermilion, Alberta, Canada, believes a handicapped farmer shouldn't have to quit farming if he doesn't want to.

And he's doing something about it. He's writing a book, slated for publication early next year, which will show farmers how they can modify their machinery to accommodate their handicap and continue farming.

The project started in the mid-seventies in Red Deer in central Alberta. When Urbanowski treated a farmer in his mid-forties.

The farmer had suffered a stroke and the right side of his body was partially paralyzed. He had resigned himself to giving up farming and selling his farm.

The farmer was reluctant to give up farming, but felt he had no other choice. Urbanowski disagreed and said there was an alternative: Switch all equipment controls to the left and learn to handle them with the left hand and foot. Urbanowski's farmer-patient pursued the idea and continued to work his farm with the help of family members.

A farmer near Fort Saskatchewan, just outside Edmonton, contracted polio as an adult. The disease paralyzed him from the waist down and he was confined to a wheel chair. He had to quit farming in the prime of his life.

But not for long. Using a John Deere tractor equipped with a hand clutch, he hoisted himself out of his wheel chair and onto the tractor seat and once again assumed the operation of his farming enterprise.

In time, he fashioned winches and hoists to get on and off most machinery on the farm. There were two jobs he could not do — seed and haul grain from combine to bin. Fortunately, he had plenty of help from his growing children.

Help from members of the farm family is essential, says Urbanowski. Even with the best of modifications and auxiliary equipment, such as hoists, a severely handicapped man will never be able to perform all farm work.

Urbanowski is gathering case histories of handicapped farmers who stayed in farming to show other farmers, through actual examples, what they can do with equipment to adapt it to their specific handicap.

Illustrations will show in detail what can be done, and how to do it. Urbanowski also intends to visit manufacturers of farm equipment, and manufacturers specializing in the modification of industrial vehicles and machinery to suit handicapped persons, to see whether they

are interested in doing something for handicapped farmers as well.

Urbanowski initiated the project but is not working on it alone. Technical advice is coming from Terry Walker, an agricultural engineer at Lakeland College in Vermilion. Carol Miller, an agricultural student at Lakeland College, is his research assistant. Financial assistance has come from the Canadian department of health and welfare. A portion of the grant pays Miller's salary. Urbanowski and Walker are contributing their time to the undertaking.

Most of the team's research is confined to Canada and the United States. But they have contacted people in Europe to find out what is being done there for the handicapped farmer. It is Urbanowski's impression that people there, particularly in England and Sweden, are more attuned to the needs not only of the handicapped farmer, but to handicapped people in general: "There is a greater awareness, generally, of the necessity to enable the handicapped person, and not just farmers, to live as useful a life as possible within the limitations of the handicap," Urbanowski points out.

Some of the case histories he has come across are astounding. For example, there's the case of a severely handicapped farmer in Iowa who carries on his operation with the help of his wife and brother.

A Texas rancher is back in the saddle despite artificial arms and legs.

Urbanowski hopes that examples like these will show other farmers in similar situations what can be done. He also hopes they will be sources of encouragement.

By the same token, if you know of a handicapped farmer who has successfully tackled his handicap, Urbanowski would like to hear about it. There is still time to include case histories in the forthcoming book.

And, if you or someone you know is handicapped and needs help with a specific equipment modification problem, you're welcome to contact Urbanowski. He stands ready to help with ideas and suggestions.

For more information, including how to order the forthcoming book, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Reg Urbanowski, General Delivery, Vermilion, Alberta, Canada T0B 4M0.



Photos courtesy Nebraska Farmer.

Norman Wegner, despite being paralyzed from the waist down, gets on and off his tractor unassisted, thanks to special hydraulic lift.

## “Lift” Puts Handicapped Farmer In Driver's Seat

Thanks to a hydraulic “lift”, handicapped Nebraska farmer Norman Wegner, of Scribner, is able to operate his tractor despite being paralyzed from the waist down as the result of a tractor-truck accident four years ago.

The hydraulically-powered platform gently lifts Wegner from ground level to the threshold of his tractor cab. From there, Wegner is able to grab handholds and a bar inside the cab to hoist himself into the driver's seat. Once in the seat, he is able to operate the clutch and brakes with his hands, using special designed levers fitted to normally foot-operated controls.

The lift doesn't run off the tractor hydraulic system. Instead, the power comes from a hydraulic pump which is driven by an electric motor drawing its power from the tractor's batteries. This hookup permits Wegner to get on or off the tractor when the tractor isn't running. He directs the lift up and down from a push-button control mounted at waist-level on the lift's guard rail.

Using hydraulics rather than a direct mechanical link with an electric motor adds another safety feature. For example, if a gear or pulley would happen to break, using a mechanical hookup, the lift would suddenly drop the rider with a thump. With hydraulics, it's “plumbed up” so that if the pump should fail, the lift will drop



Lift brings Wegner to cab level. From there, he grabs bar inside cab to pull himself into driver's seat.

slowly. It unbolts and can easily be transferred to another tractor, or to a combine or other self-propelled implement.

The lift was designed by Leonard Bashford, part-time engineering instructor at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and a partner in AB Consulting, a private engineering consulting firm in Lincoln. Blueprints for building the hydraulic lift platform are available from Otto Link at the Nebraska Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Oak Park, 7355 Pacific Street, Omaha, Neb. 68114 (ph 402 554-2100). (Reprinted with permission from the Nebraska Farmer Magazine.)