

# AGRABILITY PROJECT



## LOW VISION AND BLINDNESS

### FACT SHEET

The American Foundation for the Blind estimates that there are approximately 10 million people in the United States who are blind and visually impaired and approximately 6.5 million of them are over the age of 55. Vision loss will be a continuing problem for the aging population and will only increase in the coming years as the 78 million baby boomers reach retirement age. The average age of all U.S. principal farm operators in the 2002 Census was 55.3 years of age and they often work beyond traditional retirement age.<sup>1</sup> If not recognized and addressed properly, vision loss could become a dangerous and/or debilitating condition for farmers, ranchers, and farm workers.

#### **Signs of Vision Loss<sup>2</sup>**

The following behaviors may be signs of vision loss and may necessitate a trip to a doctor or eye-care professional:

- Constantly bumping into objects
- Having difficulty walking on irregular or bumpy surfaces or when going up and down stairs
- Stepping hesitantly or shuffling feet
- Brushing against walls while walking
- Missing objects by under-reaching or over-reaching
- Discontinuing or doing certain routine activities differently, such as reading, watching television, driving, and walking
- Difficulty reading and writing, especially in inadequate lighting

Individuals involved in production agriculture affected by blindness or vision loss can continue to live independently and maintain their rural lifestyles. AgrAbility staff can work with rehabilitation organizations, mobility specialists, and low-vision therapists to assist their clients in addressing the following needs:

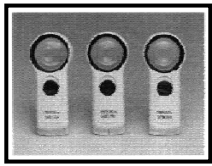
1. *Independent Living Skills*- techniques and technologies for successful management of all aspects of personal care, daily living activities and managing personal and farm business finances may need to be modified to accommodate vision loss.
2. *Communication Skills*- making information such as farm records, operating instructions, and other information accessible through large print, Braille, or other assistive devices.
3. *Mobility Skills*- safely and independently navigating the farm workspace may require specific orientation and mobility techniques, or aids such as long canes, guide dogs, and other mobility tools.
4. *Low-Vision Therapy*- increasing a farmer's ability to work in spaces with low lighting through the use of optical and adaptive devices, or simple measures such as increasing lighting quality in a darkened barn or work shed.<sup>3</sup>

Some examples of useful assistive technologies to accommodate low vision are:



### **Jessup Glo Brite Glow-in-the-Dark Safety Tape**

Glow in total darkness for up to an hour after exposure to light. Adheres to any clean, dry surface.



### **Illuminated Pocket Magnifier**

High quality magnifiers that fit in your pocket! Available in 3x, 5x, 7x, 9x, and 11x magnification.



### **Pneumatic Air Light**

The Air Light attaches to the supply hose between all existing air driven tools and uses the same compressed air that powers the tool to propel a miniature air motor. The light generated can be adjusted in any direction to provide additional light on the work surface.



### **SpeakFast Talking Torque Wrench**

SpeakFast is a speech enabled torque wrench for blind and visually impaired users.

All of these examples of assistive technology solutions for the blind or for those experiencing low vision can be found in the National AgrAbility Assistive Technology Database at:

<http://www.agrabilityproject.org/search/index.cfm>.

### **Helpful Resources:**

**American Council of the Blind:** A membership organization of blind and visually impaired people providing advocacy and services to improve quality of life for all with visual disabilities. (800) 424-8666;

<http://www.acb.org/>.

**American Foundation for the Blind:** A wealth of information on vision loss and blindness. 1-800-AFB-LINE (232-5463); <http://www.afb.org/>.

**The Low Vision Gateway:** Information, resources, and aids for low-vision and blindness at [www.lowvision.org](http://www.lowvision.org).

**Resources for Rehabilitation:** A directory of services and products for people with low vision. (781) 368 9094; [www.rfr.org](http://www.rfr.org).

**Screen Magnifiers Homepage:** Products, articles, news, and discussion forums all about screen magnification at <http://www.magnifiers.org/>.

**Universal Low Vision Aids, Inc:** Products ranging from hand-held magnifying lenses to custom computer systems. (614) 224-6465; [www.ulva.com](http://www.ulva.com).

The AgrAbility Project is administered by the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. Funding for this document was provided under project number 2004-41590-01880.

<sup>1</sup> National Agriculture Statistics Service. USDA. 2005. *What we know about the demographics of U.S. Farm Operators*. <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census02/otheranalysis/demographicpaper022505.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: American Foundation of the Blind. 2007. *Signs of vision loss*. [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org).

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: American Foundation of the Blind. 2007. *Vision rehabilitation services for older people who are visually impaired*. [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org).