

September 9, 2009

The Hon. Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On Behalf of Goodwill Industries International (Goodwill) and its 159 local Goodwill agencies in the United States, I am writing today to urge you to request funding in your FY 2011 budget for AgrAbility, a critical program that supports local Goodwill agencies' efforts to help your constituents through the dignity of work. Especially during such trying economic times, Goodwill understands the difficult challenge that the Administration faces as you struggle to stretch limited resources to support an ever-increasing list of national priorities. We stand committed to working with you toward implementing solutions that will restore economic stability by empowering disadvantaged populations, especially in rural communities.

While our community-based agencies support a variety of federal funding streams (through utilizing funds and substituting funds with our self-sustaining retail model), AgrAbility is one of our highest priority programs. Goodwill has a long history in meeting the employment and training needs of people with disabilities who live and work in rural communities, including agriculture workers and their family members who have suffered disabling injuries.

As you know, Agriculture consistently ranks as one of the nation's most dangerous occupations. According to your agency, more than 200,000 farmers, ranchers and agricultural workers acquire occupational injuries that limit their ability to perform essential work tasks. Of those 200,000 farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers who experience lost-work-time injuries and occupational illnesses every year, approximately five percent have serious and permanent results. In addition off-farm incidents and health conditions disable thousands more farmers each year.

Administered by the Department's Cooperative State, Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), AgrAbility is a \$5 million program that consists of one National AgrAbility Project and more than 20 State/Regional AgrAbility Projects. These projects must involve a collaborative partnership between a land-grant university and one or more nonprofit organizations and helps farmers who have suffered a disability to continue in the work they love, whether they are on farms, ranches, nurseries, or even at ports of entry.

While this program has been in operation for nearly twenty years, it was not included in President Obama's FY 2010 budget request. ***GOODWILL urges the Administration to request adequate funding in your FY 2011 budget for full implementation of AgrAbility Programs thereby ensuring that assistance is available in all 50 states to***

farmers, ranchers, other agricultural workers, and family members impacted by disability.

Thank you for considering this request. Should you have questions, please feel free to contact Laura Walling, Director of Advocacy and Legislative Affairs at laura.walling@goodwill.org or (240) 333-5378.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Gibbons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jim Gibbons
President and CEO

cc:

Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan

Brad Rein, National Program Leader USDA-CSREES