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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **USDA Grant Now Offers Assistance to Veteran Farmers**

**Madison, WI:** Easterseals Wisconsin's FARM Program and its partner, AgrAbility of Wisconsin, have provided services to farmers with disabilities in Wisconsin since 1989. Since the program's inception, over 3,000 farmers in the state have received services. New to the program is expanded outreach services through a three-year grant funded by the USDA's 2501 Program. The outreach grant provides 100 current and new Wisconsin veteran farmers and Socially Disadvantaged (SDA) farmers and ranchers with awareness of, increased access to, and participation in USDA programs and services within the three-year project period.

The 2501 Program was created through the 1990 Farm Bill to help SDA farmers, ranchers, and foresters, who have historically experienced limited access to USDA loans, grants, training, and technical assistance. The 2014 Farm Bill expanded the program's reach to veterans. Grants are awarded to higher education institutions and nonprofit and community-based organizations to extend USDA's engagement efforts in these communities.

In the first year of the grant, the FARM Program's focus has been to identify qualifying farmers and connect them with resources and the possibility of USDA funding. Jeff Kratochwill, Director of Easterseals Wisconsin's FARM Program, approached David Wilson, a veteran farmer and former AgrAbility consumer in the Antigo area, to discuss this new service. Several years ago, David worked with AgrAbility to obtain services to assist him with the day to day operations on his farm. His disability limitations, which stemmed from his military service, had begun to hinder his work.

"Easterseals Wisconsin and AgrAbility have been beneficial in helping me be able to continue to farm," states Wilson. "This outreach service, connecting veteran farmers and SDA farmers with USDA programs, is worthwhile to give those farmers any assistance they can to be successful."

Wilson served in the United States Army and Wisconsin Army National Guard from 1977 to 2004, retiring after 29 years of service, and has become an advocate for other veteran farmers. He currently serves on the advisory council for the Farmer Veteran Coalition of Wisconsin, whose mission is to help cultivate a new generation of farmers and food leaders and create viable careers for veterans.

"We believe that agriculture offers purpose, opportunity, and physical and psychological benefits," says Wilson. He also believes that programs such as the veteran farmer and SDA farmer grant is another great opportunity for veteran farmers to find their way in the industry.

The SDA grant continues through October 2022. Interested veteran farmers and SDA farmers and ranchers can contact Jeff Kratochwill at 608-279-9436 or [jkratochwill@eastersealswisconsin.com](mailto:jkratochwill@eastersealswisconsin.com). For more information about AgrAbility and services for farmers with disabilities, please contact Amanda Harguth, Outreach Specialist, at 608-262-9339.

For over 90 years, Easterseals Wisconsin has provided services that help children and adults with disabilities gain greater independence. Easterseals Wisconsin's primary services – vocational rehabilitation, respite services, camping and recreation, information and referral, and public education – benefit close to 10,000 individuals with disabilities and their families each year throughout Wisconsin.

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