Fadi Fathallah from UC Davis received a 4-year grant to fund California AgrAbility, a program that improves the lives of people with disabilities by helping them to stay working in agriculture. The program offers bilingual technical assistance, rehabilitation, education, referrals, and advocacy to workers with disabilities along with its partner, AbilityTools.

“Agriculture is one of the most hazardous industries in the United States, with over 20,000 disabling injuries in California each year,” reports Principal Investigator Fathallah, a professor of Engineering in the UC Davis Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering.

California AgrAbility has helped more than 600 small farmers and Latino farmworkers with disabilities with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute on Food and Agriculture. The program offers assistive technology solutions as simple as ergonomic handles for moving potted plants in nurseries, to more complex solutions such as modified steering wheels in farm vehicles, or assistive lifts to help drivers enter their tractors or operate heavy equipment.

One farmer who recently benefited from the program is Anna. When her disease symptoms began to interfere with her work on the farm, she realized it was time to get help. Anna has multiple sclerosis, continued to page 3 of the document for more information.
Summer 2015 Letter from the Director

New Director of the California AgrAbility Project: Fadi Fahillah
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Through a collaboration between California AgrAbility and the California Department of Rehabilitation, Anna received financial support for two assistive devices – a cooling vest and a personal air conditioning [AC] unit will revolutionize the way she works. Anna noted that she had been frustrated by the lack of effective strategies to reduce fatigue while working in the field. The success of these strategies is due to the collaboration between Anna, her colleagues, and the California Department of Rehabilitation.

Older adults, minorities, and those who are medically underserved are the at-risk populations assisted by California AgrAbility. Due to language or cultural barriers, many of these individuals have difficulty locating health providers, accessing services, and communicating with health providers. California AgrAbility is working to promote it nationally to high school science class curricula, including the safe-at-work-curriculum.

Fahillah and his colleagues not only connect workers like Anna with the latest health and safety interventions, they also design new ones. For example, to bring greater awareness of chronic fatigue, the University of California, Davis, has developed air powered sheers, funded by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.