

Ohio AgrAbility and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities: Collaborating with Ohio's State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

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Ohio AgrAbility's mission is to promote success in agriculture for Ohio's farmers and farm families who are coping with disability or a long-term health condition.



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Agenda:

- Highlight the benefits of having a collaborative relationship with your state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency.
- Review Importance of communicating with VR to advocate for farmers regarding policy, eligibility and services.
- Share ways to build rapport and involvement with your state VR agency (Advisory Board memberships, trainings, VR liaison, farm visits, and contributing during open comment periods regarding updates to VR policies).

What is Vocational Rehabilitation?

- Vocational rehabilitation is a series of services that are designed to facilitate the entrance into or return to work by people with disabilities or by people who have recently acquired an injury or disability.
- Services include vocational assessment and evaluation, on-the-job training, and consulting with potential or existing employers for job accommodations and modification.
- These services may also vary depending on the needs of the individual,

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Rehabilitation Services Administration

Mission: The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) provides leadership and resources to assist state and other agencies in providing vocational rehabilitation and other services to individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence, and integration into the community and the competitive labor market. <https://rsa.ed.gov/about>



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Mission: Empowering Ohioans with disabilities through employment, disability determinations, and independence.

<https://ood.ohio.gov/about-us>

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How does OOD work with Ohio AgrAbility?

If farmers are able to keep farming after receiving vocational rehabilitation services and paying taxes back into the system, then the vocational rehabilitation program pays for itself.



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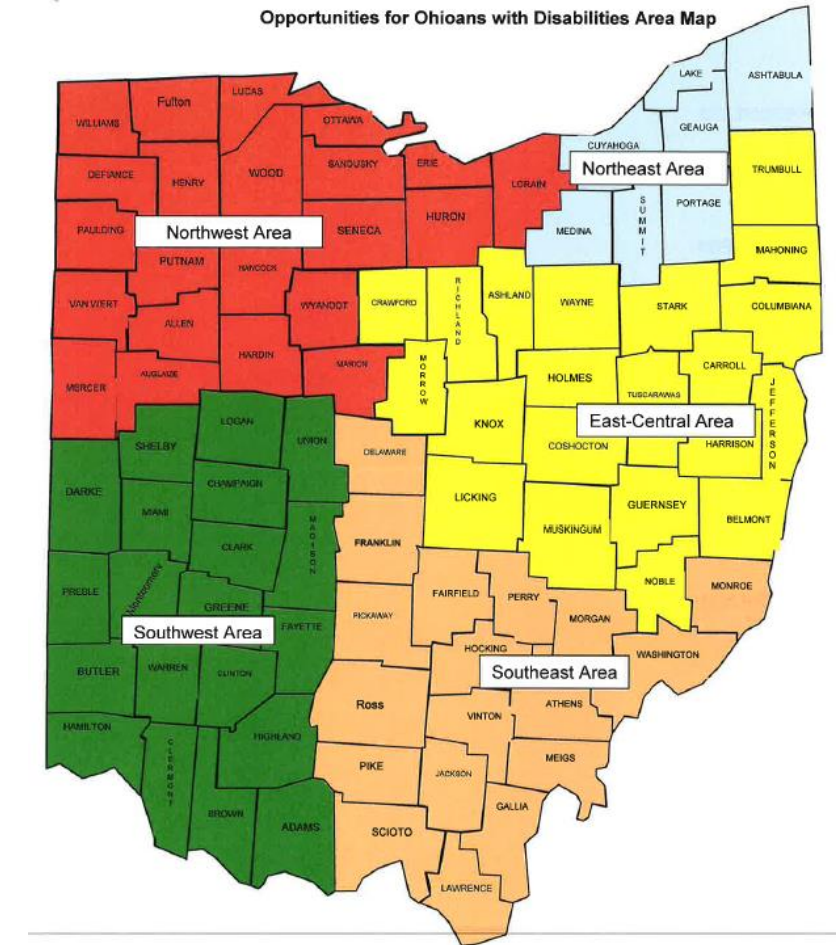
The need for an Ohio AgrAbility-OOD liaison

- 5 supervisor liaisons across the state in 88 counties.
- 60% of the referrals in the NW area.
- Lack of time and consistency among cases statewide.
- Need consistent fee schedule service.
- Need consistent rehabilitation technology reports.



The need for an Ohio AgrAbility-OOD liaison

- Need low tech, mid tech, and high tech options along with justifications for high tech options when lower tech is not appropriate.
- Helps ensure counselors follow rehab technology policy and procedure when authorizing for items over \$5k.
- The self-employment policy and procedure is not in line with rehabilitation technology policy and procedure.



Ohio AgrAbility – OOD liaison

- Single point of contact and field guidance,
- As the OOD liaison to AgrAbility statewide, I handle policy/procedure questions from counselors, referral management, and attend monthly meetings with the AgrAbility team,
- A flowchart and frequently asked questions document were developed to provide more specific guidance that works hand in hand with OOD's policies and procedure.

Ohio AgrAbility – OOD liaison

Services

- Services are now listed under rehabilitation technology in the OOD Fee Schedule with a report template, service description, and cost structure with low, mid, and high-tech options explained and justified.

Case management

- I assist in case management for both OOD and AgrAbility, so that no referrals fall through the cracks. Referrals are followed up at each monthly meeting with AgrAbility.

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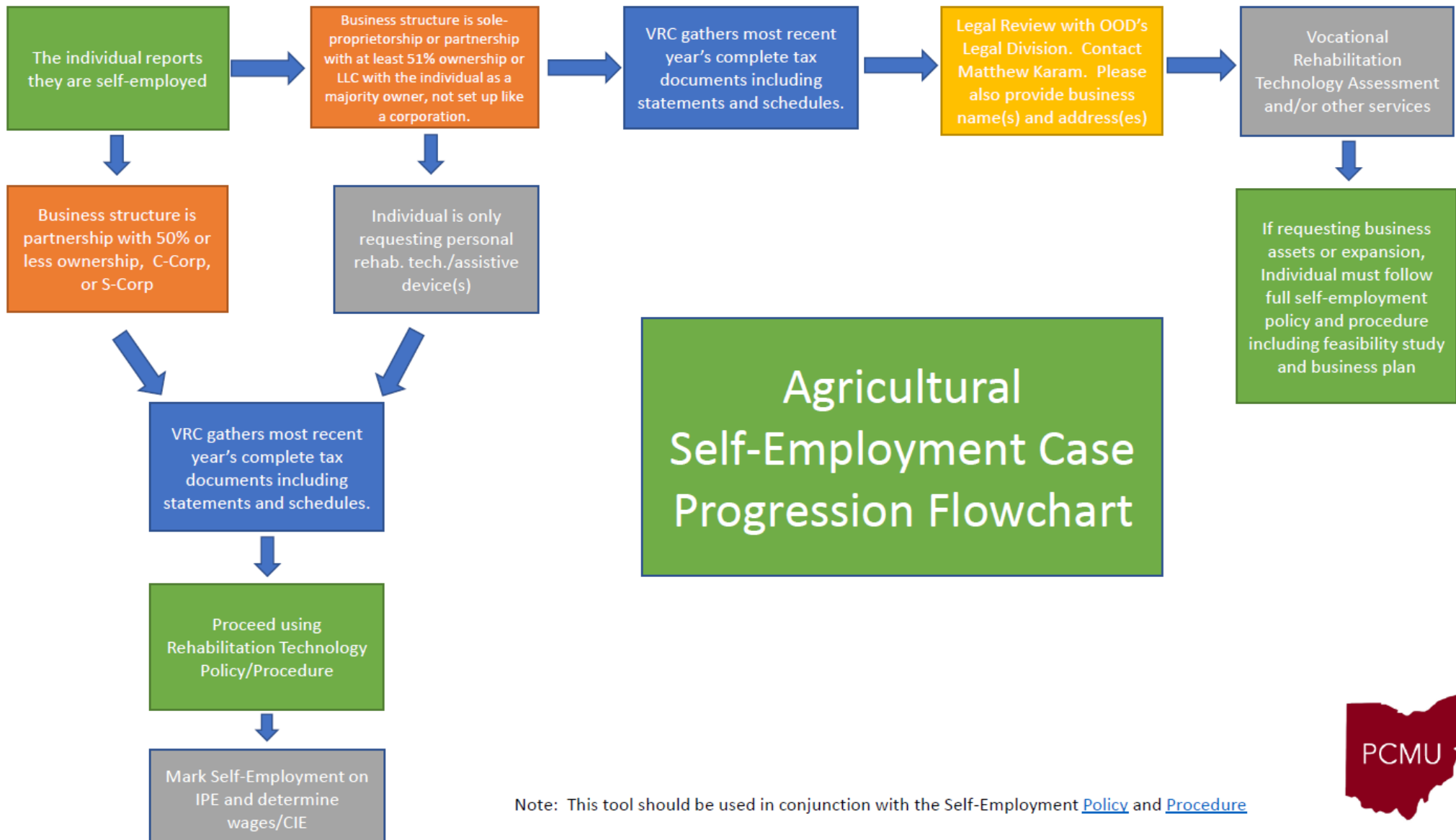


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Agricultural Self-Employment Case Progression Flowchart



Note: This tool should be used in conjunction with the Self-Employment [Policy](#) and [Procedure](#)



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Benefits of having a collaborative relationship with OOD

- How the farmers are served.
- Ginger is utilized as a resource by OOD Counselors AND OAP staff.
- Ginger can check case status.
- Breadth of knowledge, “interprets” OOD language and decisions.
- We “name drop” Ginger to get permission for farm visits.

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Communication with OOD on behalf of farmers

- Rural Rehabilitation Coordinators interview farmers to determine eligibility comparisons before submitting to OOD.
- Let farmers know the questions OOD is going to ask (taxes, medical history, income) before they apply.
- Provide OOD with overview of farm practices, barriers to working safely and productively, and recommendations for modifications and/or adaptations to keep farmers farming.

Speaking up for farmers: Open comment period

- Gave an opportunity to say “Ohio AgrAbility cases are different, and may not fit within policy”.
- LLCs were not allowed (per policy).
- Rachel wrote a letter on behalf of OAP team re: why farmers might have an LLC but still be a sole proprietor.
- Result: OOD will now review cases that fall under LLC, S-Corp or C-Corp for eligibility.
- More farmers are eligible for services.

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Advisory Board and OOD trainings

- Supervisors from each of the 5 OOD regions are on our Advisory Board.
- Keeps supervisors updated on OAP activities and initiatives.
- Introduces OOD supervisors to other stakeholders and farmers on the Advisory Board.
- Advisory Board weighs in on outreach and engagement.
- OAP has provided trainings for ALL OOD counselors (Overview of OAP services).

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Why we invite OOD Counselors to Farm visits

- What does the farmers daily work look like?
- Farmers can explain why they need a very expensive piece of equipment that they use a few weeks or months a year.
- Counselor is invited to the “wrap up” – equipment delivery.



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Farm visits

- Counselor and OAP staff learn something at every farm visit.
- Farmer is best at telling their story.
- Each farm is very different, what works at one farm may not work at another.



Do you need a state VR Liaison to work with your AgrAbility Project?

Tips for advocating for a VR liaison

- Creates better communication and rapport between VR, AgrAbility and farmers
- AgrAbility staff learn about VR processes (and VR learns AgrAbility processes)
- Liaison gives you an expert in VR to problem solve and review questions before submitting final Assessment
- Liaison can access and share information about current client status with AgrAbility staff.

Summary

- OOD has committed to serving farmers through creating a Liaison role – streamlined processes, up to date information - Ginger is the AgrAbility expert at OOD.
- Speak up during Open Comment periods – advocate for your farmers.
- Ask VR Supervisors to serve on your Advisory Board - their insight is invaluable, and they can interact with other Advisory Board members and stakeholders.
- Invite VR counselors to farm visits so they can see the results of the AgrAbility VR collaboration and share in the success.

For more information - [Agrability.osu.edu/resources](https://agrability.osu.edu/resources)

- **32 Ohio AgrAbility Fact Sheets**
 - Assistive Tech for the farm
 - Universal Design on the farm
 - Managing arthritis when farming
- **Handouts** for stretching, farm and garden equipment, and an outline of this presentation
- **Ohio AgrAbility videos**
 - <https://agrability.osu.edu/resources/webinars-and-handouts-2020-2022>
- **Follow us on social media**
 - Facebook.com/OhioAgrAbility
 - Twitter.com/OhioAgrAbility
- **Podcasts**
 - Rural Woman Podcast episode 110

AgrAbility.osu.edu Questions?



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