



Opportunities in Agriculture for Youth with Disabilities

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According to 2023 Bureau of Labor Statistics data:

People with a disability account for **13% of the population**

The **unemployment rate** for people with a disability is **twice that** of people without a disability

Workers with a disability were **more likely to be employed part time** than those without a disability

People with a disability are **less likely to complete a bachelor's degree** and **less likely to be employed** than those without a disability

Between industry, small farming operations, local programming and farmer's markets, agriculture offers pathways for youth with disabilities to engage in employment.

The USDA/NIFA National AgrAbility program in Florida has been showcasing the opportunities in agriculture through networking and marketing and pilots for youth programming geared towards the disability community. The vision of AgrAbility is "to enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities, so that they, their families, and their communities continue to succeed in rural America." Providing access to opportunities for youth with disabilities at a young age can foster the idea of agriculture as a career pathway.

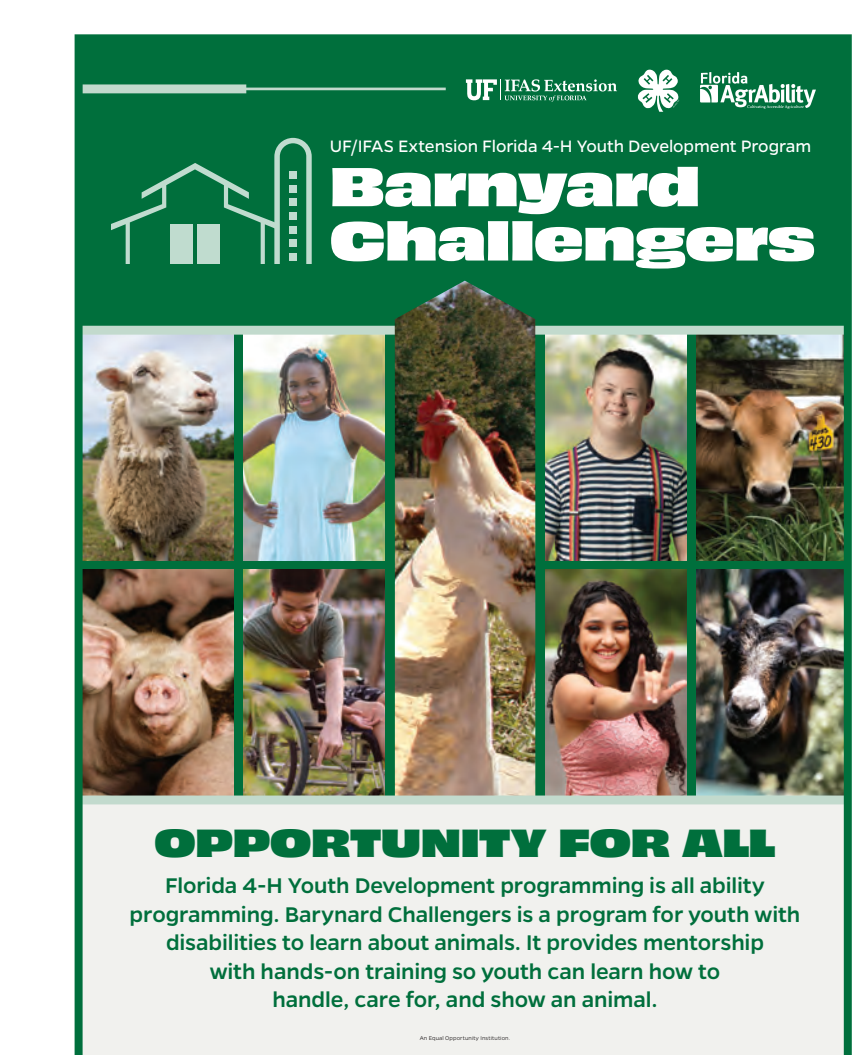
The goals of these programs are to promote life skill development while building soft skills and core competencies in agricultural related industry positions for people with disabilities while creating pathways for young adults with disabilities to enter the workforce.

HOW CAN THIS BE DONE?

- Increasing knowledge and practices related to agriculture and workforce development in the disability community
 - Programming should be designed around agricultural skills, emerging technologies, job readiness skill sets, etc.
 - Adapting current 4-H and extension programs to benefit people with disabilities in areas related to agriculture business: horticulture, entrepreneurship, small farms, beekeeping, etc.
 - Showcase opportunities to disability specific groups by providing agricultural programs targeted to their populations and needs.
- Providing opportunities for skill development
 - Prioritize skills and experience over education through informal educational opportunities.
 - Support, adapt, or create appropriate credentialing programs for people with disabilities to gain skill sets.
- Promote mentor or buddy programs that encourage life skill development while learning about agricultural employment opportunities.
- Create volunteering, apprenticing, and/or interning opportunities in the community through partnerships and connections.
- Engaging industry, community and stakeholders
 - Educate and address the barriers for potential employers and partners through education.
 - Provide outreach opportunities to communities to build awareness around the agriculture industry for people with disabilities.
 - Set up networks of potential partners to encourage increased workforce opportunities.

EXAMPLE PROGRAM INITIATIVE: BARNYARD CHALLENGERS

Barnyard Changers is a program designed for youth ages 8 and up who have a disability and want to participate in a livestock project. Youth are paired up with mentors who guide them through learning about and caring for a project animal. Mentors are provided with training ahead of time before committing to 7 learning sessions with their mentee. Learning sessions focus on Universal Design Learning principles with the opportunity for youth to learn at a pace that works best for them. The culminating activity includes an opportunity for recognition and achievement by participating in local fairs or livestock shows. The goal is to build awareness of the competency and ability of youth with disabilities in the mentors and to introduce agriculture to youth with disabilities while promoting life skills such as responsibility, communication, and independence.



CONCLUSION

Low employment rates for people with disabilities make workforce development programs geared towards youth with disabilities a priority. Youth with disabilities have less opportunities to enter the workforce and employers are hesitant to hire people with disabilities. Creating employment pathways can help young adults with disabilities become contributing members of their communities and society.