

**ESTABLISHING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY'S VALUE IN THE LIVES OF  
AGRICULTURAL WORKERS**

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Mentor Signature:

Learning Objective: Following this presentation, attendees in this interprofessional audience will be able to determine existing areas of occupational therapy research specifically for agricultural workers and identify the need for focused clinical research to support practice.

## ESTABLISHING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY'S VALUE IN THE LIVES OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

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**Background:** In the agricultural community, an estimated 1.04 million to 2.23 million people working and living in rural American live and work with one or more disabilities. With the nature of disabilities ranging from age related functional limitations to work related injuries, one common theme that arises for the agricultural community involves limited access to health care and compliance with health care professionals. One agency project exists on the federal level to support farmers and ranchers who are experiencing injury or disability, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National AgrAbility Project (NAP). Along with NAP, occupational therapists are equipped with unique knowledge on activity analysis, client-focused goals, use of everyday tasks as interventions, and extensive knowledge in assistive technology and modifying work environments. Research remains limited on the role that occupational therapists can fill while treating agricultural workers and possible interventions to anticipate in practice.

**Purpose:** The aim of this critically appraised topic is to answer the clinical focused question of: What are existing practice opportunities and interventions used by occupational therapists when serving rural agricultural communities on enhancing and improving occupational performance? By answering this question, the goal is to inform future practice, education, and research for occupational therapists.

**Method:** Search of the literature was conducted by focusing on specific areas relevant to the clinical question. Databases used during the search of the literature included: *Academic Search Complete*, *Ovid*, *Pub Med*, *AJOT*, *Agricola*, and *Google Scholar*. Search terms used where combine in multiple ways including "rural", "AgrAbility", "agriculture", "occupational therapy", "health management", "wellness", "disabilities", and "interventions". Limits used for review included publications from January 1999 until present time, and English language. Inclusion criteria included any age, injuries and/or disabilities resulting from agricultural work including chronic and accidental injuries, outcomes including pre/post results, and interventions within the scope of occupational therapy practice. Studies excluded involved suggestions for practice or program development and studies without interventions.

**Results:** From the literature review, 10 relevant articles were located and 3 of those 10 articles were identified as best evidence. The evidence presented in this critically appraised topic suggests that areas of practice for occupational therapy in existing literature includes improving occupational performance through physical and ergonomic techniques, environmental modifications, assistive technology, and return to work strategies. Other areas of evidence in this CAT suggests that occupational therapy currently has a role for evaluation, case management, and consultation in conjunction with the USDA's AgrAbility projects, however no definitive research on the exact and precise services that occupational therapy provides as a member of projects across the nation.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** Injury and disability remains a prominent factor in work production of agricultural workers. Evidence remains limited in regards to the extent of types of occupational therapy services are provided and if occupational therapy interventions effect outcomes in agricultural communities. Further research on already used intervention techniques need to be applied to this population so we can justify our expertise and role when working with farmers and ranchers.

**Relevance to Allied Health:** Allied health professionals need to remain vigilant in gaining patient history and considering environmental factors when working with agricultural workers. Professionals need to consider farmers and ranchers as they live an all-encompassing way of life with little to no options for occupational changes.