

A Closer Look

Quitting: Not an option

AgrAbility catches up with Dan DeBoer

Maybe it's his solid family background or his strong Christian faith. Perhaps it's his stubborn Dutch heritage. Probably all these and more have made Dan DeBoer an overcomer.

Readers of the former *Breaking New Ground Newsletter* may remember meeting Dan in 1991 via an article titled, "He Lost His Legs, But Not His Heart," reprinted from *Farm Journal*.¹ Recently, Paul Jones and Bill Field of the National AgrAbility Project had the chance to chat with Dan during one of his business trips to Lafayette, Indiana.



Dan DeBoer with Bill Field of the National AgrAbility Project

Deep Roots

Farming is a DeBoer way of life. Dan's grandfather homesteaded the family farm on the far south side of Chicago, an area known as Chicago Heights, and one that is becoming increasingly suburbanized. Originally a truck farm, the DeBoers eventually came to specialize in crops like tomatoes and onions. After graduating from Calvin College, Dan took over management of the farm, and his career path seemed firm.

A Heavy Blow – Followed by a Heavier One

Troubles don't always come one at a time. For Dan, the start of his troubles came in the form of a fertilizer cart. While working under it in May 1986, the cart fell on DeBoer, resulting in broken ribs, a collapsed lung, and the removal of a kidney and his spleen.

The spleen isn't an organ often heard of or thought about. However, when it is missing, the body loses an important barrier against disease, which Dan found out the hard way. In 1987, what he thought was merely the flu turned out to be a streptococcal infection. Without his spleen to help ward off the disease, and with limited blood-flow to his extremities, the devastating consequences for Dan were the amputation of his nose, several fingers, and both legs below the knee.

Facing the Unknowns

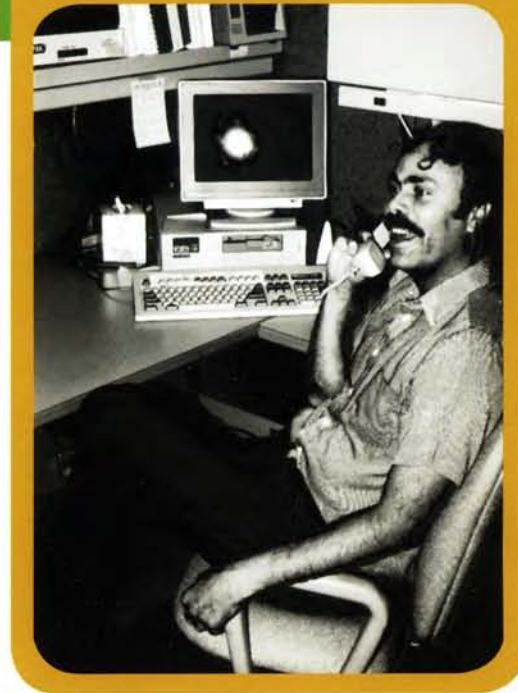
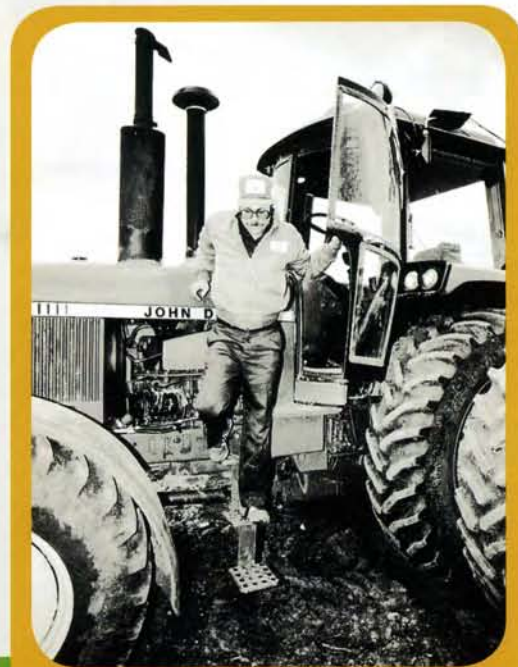
When disabling trauma strikes, many people grapple with similar, disheartening questions. "How will I be able to function again?" "Will I be able to support my family?" For Dan, his fears included what people would think about his hands, how to handle normal day-to-day tasks, and even how he'd eat a Whopper.

DeBoer counts it a blessing that he was able to recover at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, a facility commonly rated at the top of national polls. The therapy was challenging, but his recovery was rapid. Once fitted with prosthetic legs, Dan began walking with two canes and eventually progressed to using none.

¹ Darrell Smith, "He Lost His Legs, but not His Heart," *Farm Journal*, 1991.



(Above) Dan speaking at a recent event. (Right) Pictures of Dan from 1990s.



Overcoming by Innovating

On returning to farming, Dan faced several obstacles well beyond the anticipated challenges of farming with multiple disabilities. Severe drought gripped much of North America in 1988, an event now considered one of the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history. In addition, the DeBoers lost approximately \$120,000 in tomatoes to excessive rain in 1989.

In response to these catastrophes, Dan turned to commodities marketing (something he'd always been good at) to supplement the family income. After graduating from commodity school, he founded D.B. Marketing (www.db-marketinginc.com) and began building his client base—one farmer at a time. Twenty years later, he's still at it, following the markets full-time and advising clientele on the best price and time to sell.

Faith for the Future

Dan DeBoer has proven himself to be a man of faith and a shining example of an overcoming spirit. He has built D.B. Marketing into a prosperous enterprise, offering not only individual advice but also a seminar series during the winter. In addition, he's a husband of 28 years, a father of three, a grandfather, and a private pilot with a newly-purchased plane.

Of course, Dan still has his challenges, like the time that one of his prosthetic legs snapped in half while shopping. True to form, he just threw it in the shopping cart, leaned on the cart for support, and kept going—because for Dan DeBoer, quitting is not an option. ■