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Farm Rescue to the Rescue

*By Tina Foreman
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Illness and injury are things that we all know can happen to us. But with no way of planning for them, it's always an unwelcome surprise, especially when a family member is forced out of work for an extended period of time.

Most people would probably struggle financially for a few months during recovery, but they would get by.



Photo by Neal Shipman, McKenzie County Farmer Editor

However, if you're a farmer and can't get your crop harvested due to an injury, you would not only be without work during recovery, but you would be without income for an entire year, because if your crop doesn't get harvested there isn't going to be money for the following year's planting or other farm operations.

Gary and Kathy Skarda have been struggling with this since an accident on May 4, 2009. But thanks to Farm Rescue and the help of their family and friends, the Skardas' crop is in the bin and ready to be sold.

"It was May 4 at 7:45 p.m. There's nothing like a life-changing event to put a date into your memory," says Kathy, "Gary was out riding a new horse that he bought for me, and when he put his foot in the stirrup, the horse just went crazy."

Gary was severely injured when the horse reared up, throwing him into the saddle horn and then to the ground.

"He hit the saddle horn and broke his pelvis completely in two," says Kathy. "Then when he hit the ground he broke his hip causing the leg to move away and basically hang on its own. He also received life threatening internal injuries. But thankfully, he's recovering at home now."

Gary was forced to count on his family and friends to get his cattle branded and seed his crops while he was in the hospital.

Fortunately, Skarda is no longer in the hospital and is able to continue his recovery from home, but it will still be several months before life is back to normal, which meant that Skarda would not be able to harvest this year's crop. This is where the Farm Rescue organization stepped in to help.

“Farm Rescue and my brother, Wayne finished harvest on Sept. 14,” says Skarda. “It was really hard for me to sit in this wheelchair and watch from the window because I’m used to doing it all myself. I just don’t know how we would have got it all done without Farm Rescue and my brother.”

Farm Rescue is a nonprofit organization that helps family farmers bridge crises so they have an opportunity to continue viable operations.

Farm Rescue provides planting and harvesting assistance to farm families that have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster. Qualifying farmers may be eligible to have their agricultural land planted or harvested free of charge.

“If I could tell people anything about this experience, I would tell them, ‘Don’t be afraid to call Farm Rescue’,” says Skarda. “They are available to help and they did a great job at my place.”

Farm Rescue does not distribute funds to farmers. Donations are used to pay for the expenses associated with the planting and harvesting of crops. Labor for operating the equipment is provided by Farm Rescue volunteers and equipment is donated.

Farmers in need submit an application, with at least half of the Farm Rescues cases coming from a neighbor or other referral.

“I can’t say enough good things about them,” adds Skarda. “If it weren’t for my brother and Farm Rescue, I don’t know what we would have done. But, it’s in the bin so now my worries about harvest are over. I hope to be walking by November and back to 90 percent by spring, so I hope to be able to do it on my own next year.”

For more information on how to donate, volunteer or apply for assistance, visit the Farm Rescue web site at www.farmrescue.org.