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## Farm Rescue finishes season tough on many farmers

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*Submitted Photos*



The **Jim** and **Audrey Ostlie** farm near Northwood was one of 10 farms in North Dakota to receive assistance from Farm Rescue this year. Jim fell through his two-story barn while tending to his sheep and suffered several injuries including broken ribs, fractured vertebrae, brain bleeding and a swollen heart.

While the 2009 planting season was a stressful time for perfectly healthy farmers with standing water on cropland and broken fences on pastureland, those who suffered recent injuries or health issues faced the prospect of having their land forced into dormancy as time and strength continued to be in short supply.

Although Farm Rescue faced similar time and weather constraints, the non-profit group once again came to the aid of producers in the Dakotas and Minnesota, helping 22 farm families in the region plant soybeans, wheat and other crops. With flooding across much of the state, North Dakota received the most assistance with 10 farms, followed by South Dakota with seven and Minnesota with five farms.

"This year was definitely a challenge. With the late spring, the planting window was narrower so we helped less people than we were able to last year, but our volunteers worked tirelessly," said Pam Musland, director of operations for Farm Rescue. "This year was different because we had a lot of farmers that knew they had major surgeries coming up but they thought their crops would already been in the ground with the wet weather that didn't happen and the neighbors that would normally help out were so frantic about their own crops that they couldn't help."

The group began the planting season in Alcester, S.D., on May 2 planting soybeans for a farmer who was recovering from injuries suffered in a car accident. Using two planting units, the organization moved quickly through eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, eventually

making their way into North Dakota. Farm Rescue began in Hebron, finishing planting their first farm on May 5 and ended their planting season in Starkweather-Egeland on June 4.

Throughout the state, Farm Rescue planted crops in fields as far east as Northwood, as far north as Starkweather and as far west as Hebron to help farmers who suffered from multiple-story falls, severed fingers, cancer, complications with vital organ and other losses.

Among those helped was Jim Ostlie of Northwood, who was out in his barn one day preparing to feed his sheep when he fell through the second-story of his barn, falling 15 feet onto a concrete floor where he remained for hours. He suffered four broken ribs, fractured vertebrae in his neck and sustained trauma to his head and brain. Volunteers came out in early May to plant hundreds of acres of beans.

While helping to move snow in January, Calvin Schmidt, who farms 2,100 acres and runs 200 head of cattle northeast of Mandan, lost multiple fingers after a piece of equipment failed, severing three of his fingers on one hand and severely injuring the fourth making it difficult and painful for him to repair fences or broken down machinery.

A third generation farmer in Hebron, Lyle Voth underwent heart valve surgery in April and was told he couldn't do any strenuous activity for at least three months - the entire spring planting season. Farm Rescue came out in May and helped to plant crops on some of the family's 1,600 acres.

"We really can't thank them enough they're pretty much our heroes," said Voth's wife, Brenda, in a YouTube video. "It's a blessing they did this."

Suffering financially was Leroy Materi of Linton, who lost more than half of his herd and suffered serious damage to his cropland and pastureland due to the flooding this past spring.

"Of all the cases, and we've done a lot of ones that were so needy, this is one of our best cases for helping," said Gene Schicke, one of Farm Rescue's 12 volunteers. "Anything we can do to make his life a little easier."

The volunteers removed downed tree branches and cleared debris on land to allow more crops to be planted in an effort to make up some of the financial loss he experienced with his herd.

Altogether, the volunteers put more than 600 hours in behind the wheel of the tractors and Musland said they hope to help 36 families next year, weather permitting.

Since 2006, Farm Rescue has planted or harvested crops for more than 90 farmers in the four-state area from western Minnesota through North and South Dakota and into eastern Montana. Farm families can have up to 1,000 acres planted free of charge by volunteers that uses agricultural equipment sponsored by RDO Equipment Co.