

The cover features a top section with a close-up of corn plants and a white paper-like background. The main body of the cover is a wide photograph of a lush green cornfield in the foreground, with a farm including a red barn and silos in the distance under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

JUNE 2014

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A SOUTH DAKOTA CORN PUBLICATION

NO-TILL CATCHES ON • EXPORTS RISING AGAIN

## Farm Rescue offers a helping hand in the field

By Jill Callison

Last summer, Daniel Ash found himself out of options. The small-grain farmer had delayed back surgery repeatedly, knowing it would keep him out of the fields for a year. In mid-July 2013, however, his surgeon told him further delays would mean paralysis or a wheelchair.

A neighbor volunteered to harvest his soybeans; two other neighbors agreed to bring in the wheat. That left 350 acres of corn in a Day County field.

Ash picked up the phone.



From left to right: Bill Gross, Dan Ash and Roger Artz

"I'd read about this group in farm magazines," he said. "And I just decided I would probably have to give them a call and say, 'I've got this problem. Can you come out and help?'"

"This group" is Farm Rescue, a nonprofit established by Bill Gross, who grew up on his family's farm west of Jamestown, N.D. Its purpose is to provide free planting and harvesting assistance for farm families who have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster.

Gross flies international routes for UPS, but his heart never left the farming community, he says.

### Whenever, wherever needed

His parents often went abroad on mission trips, and Gross did the same: from building houses to leading Bible study to working in orphanages in places such as Romania and Croatia. On one 15-hour flight, he began considering his retirement plans and how he could help people in the United States. He would become a random good Samaritan, Gross decided, helping people whenever and wherever they needed it.

"I'd get a big John Deere tractor and planter and drive from one end of the state to another end, tell people to fill it up with fuel and throw seed in and some fertilizer, and I'll plant for you," Gross said.

He shared those plans with a friend, who challenged him not to wait, but start immediately. He also pointed out the number of injuries and accidents that can happen on a farm, leaving people in need of help. "As I drove away from dinner, it all kind of flashed before my eyes," Gross said. "This is it. This would be my mission field."

That was the beginning of Farm Rescue, which officially was founded in 2006. Gross funded the program his first year and has never accepted a salary, nor does Farm Rescue's board. With the help of sponsors and donors, Farm Rescue offers planting, harvesting and haying assistance to people in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and eastern Montana.



RDO Equipment Co., the nation's largest John Deere dealership, sponsors the equipment used by Farm Rescue volunteers. Other sponsors include Glacial Lakes Energy of Watertown, Dakota Bank, Walmart, North Central Farmers Elevator of Ipswich, Sheehan Mack Sales of Sioux Falls and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

Sixty percent of Farm Rescue's funding comes from business sponsors, 30 percent from foundations and 10 percent through public donations.

Farm Rescue has compiled a database of more than 700 volunteers. They come from as far away as New York, Florida, Texas and California. Every fall, a pastor in Oregon drives semis filled with grain from farm to elevator. Many volunteers are retired farmers, but they come from all professions, Gross said.

### Ipswich farmer gets help

Two volunteers planted 400 acres of corn and beans for Roger Artz last spring. The Ipswich-area grain and livestock farmer tore a tendon in his shoulder working with cattle, then tore it more during spring calving. He underwent surgery on March 30, 2013.

"It's not really easy to ask for help," Artz said. "They were down south with their equipment, so the two men actually just ran my equipment. They were here two or three days. I visited with one of them in the field, and they just felt good helping other people out."

Farm Rescue offers a way for people and businesses to help farm families in rural communities during unexpected crises, Gross said.

"Neighbors have helped neighbors in the past, and they still do, but now there are bigger farms and less manpower and children," he said. "They don't know if someone 10 or 12 miles down the road has been injured and needs help."

Farm Rescue also offers its assistance when spouses and children are ill or injured, not just the farmer.

"It all affects the family farm," Gross said. "We're here to help when they have an unexpected family crisis, to get them through the season, to get their feet back on the ground."

Even though he grew up on a farm, Gross said until he started Farm Rescue he hadn't realized how many dangers farmers encounter daily. "So many illnesses and injuries can happen on a farm," he said. The one thing Farm Rescue can't do is help after a death. IRS restrictions prevent assistance in that situation.

Farm Rescue receives 75 to 100 applications annually, and Gross expects to help another 50 farmers this year. Ash, the Day County farmer, is eligible for a second year of assistance. While his repaired back is healing, he won't know until he sits in a tractor whether he can handle long days in the cab. He also needs surgery for a blocked artery in his leg.

His stepson, son-in-law and a neighbor helped put in his crop this spring.

"They came when I needed them, and I think they would come again," Ash said of Farm Rescue. "But there's probably more people who need it worse than I do."



In South Dakota, agriculture is about families and children. Eleven-year-old Clayton Smith works with his grandpa on his family's farm, taking care of sheep and chickens. "When I grow up, I want to be a farmer," says Clayton. Until then, he participates in 4-H — showing animals, riding bulls and making friends.

Clayton Smith • Freeman, SD

Learn more at [thisisfarming.org](http://thisisfarming.org)

To apply for assistance from Farm Rescue, visit [farmrescue.org](http://farmrescue.org) or call 701-252-2017.

Contributions made to Farm Rescue, a 501(c)3 organization, are tax deductible.