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Farm Rescue takes to the fields again this spring

By DALE HILDEBRANT, Farm & Ranch Guide
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LINTON, N.D. - The sun was out and a warm wind was drying the farm land around the Linton area as a volunteer crew from Farm Rescue scurried about.

The crew made good use of the cooperative weather conditions in their effort to help Leroy Materi get his wheat crop seeded. This is the fourth year of activity for Farm Rescue and by the time they got to Materi's place on Saturday, May 9, they had already been at three other farms to help with planting.

The situation at Linton was unique in the fact that a group of volunteers was needed to clear debris from the fields before planting could begin. About 20 volunteers combed Materi's fields, picking up tree branches and other items deposited there by severe overland flooding this spring.



Materi's land borders the normally placid Beaver Creek, just west of Linton. But earlier this spring an ice jam broke on the creek, sending a wall of three to four-foot deep ice chunks and icy water across his farm. The water and ice moved so fast that cattle were unable to flee the approaching ice chunks and were knocked to the ground much like a bowling ball levels the pins at the end of the alley.

When the waters started to recede Materi's worst fears were realized, over 60 percent of his beef cow herd was victim to the ice and water.

“It looked like a war zone,” Materi said. “When the flood waters came down the creek, it just lifted the ice out of the creek and the floating ice acted like a bowling ball - it knocked their feet out from underneath them, causing them to fall down and (they) couldn't get back up again. Many of them had broken legs. The ice pushed them up against the buildings, fences and the machinery parked in the yard.”

Some of the nearby fields and his entire farmstead were covered with up to two feet of water. When the water receded back into the banks of the creek, the debris it washed up on the land remained. Thus the need for volunteers to clean the fields before planting could begin on some of the low-lying ground.

During that Saturday employees of Aetna Insurance and Basin Electric in Bismarck and KEM Electric Cooperative volunteers cleared the remnants of flood from 200 acres of cropland and rangeland, plus a large portion of the farm site.

“This is a unique volunteer effort for us as some of our sponsors went the extra mile to provide the manpower to clear Leroy's fields so we could plant as much of his crop as possible,” said



Part of the volunteer team that cleaned flood debris from the Leroy Materi farm near Linton, N.D.

Pam Musland, director of operations at Farm Rescue. “Neighbors and other people helped, too; one individual even brought a skid steer from Bismarck. It's been a great, cooperative effort, and they have been working hard.”

“This is the first time I have ever met a lot of these volunteers,” Materi said, adding that this wasn't the only volunteer group that helped in the Linton area.

“The Billy Graham's Operation Blessing really helped the town of Linton earlier after the flooding,” he said. “I can't say enough about

them. They cleaned a lot of houses in town and came out in the country and cleaned houses out here. They came from as far away as California and we had some kids here from Canada, Texas and Florida. It's surprising to see how far people will go in a time of disaster to help out another person.”

The arrival of the Farm Rescue team was especially heartening to Materi, since much of his machinery is still damaged from sitting in the flood water and will require some attention before it can be operational again. In addition, several bins of grain took on water and are now spoiled.

Materi also raises some oats and row crops, and he figures that he will be able to get those planted in a timely manner once he works a little on his equipment. But getting his 700 acres of wheat seeded was his first major priority and then he heard Farm Rescue would help in that area.

This is the fourth North Dakota farm that has received help from Farm Rescue this spring. Earlier volunteers were in the Hebron area and planted 1000 acres for Lyle Voth who recently had heart valve surgery. They were also near Flasher where they assisted Valentine Kuntz who was limited in the activities he could perform after having a pacemaker installed. Calvin Schmidt from Mandan, who had his hand crushed in an accident and lost three fingers and severely damaged a fourth, also received assistance from Farm Rescue.

The seeding window is becoming shorter with each passing day, Musland said in reference to the wet weather that has slowed planting progress across the region. But the goal is to get to every family on the list yet this spring, she added.

A second unit is making its way across South Dakota under the guidance of Bill Gross, founder of the organization. In total, plans call for 22 farm families in the Dakotas and Minnesota to

receive planting help this spring through the efforts of Farm Rescue.

The sponsorship list continues to grow for Farm Rescue. Recently San Juan Outfitting in Colorado became a \$10,000 donor, even though the program isn't operational in that state.

“I am amazed that someone in Colorado would send a \$10,000 check to us,” Musland said. “They sent a check, knowing we don't do anything in Colorado, but as the program grows maybe someday we will get to that area. It's really amazing.”

The planting progress of Farm Rescue can be tracked on their Web site www.farmrescue.org, where activities of the volunteer crews for both units are updated on a daily basis.



Leroy Materi (left) and Farm Rescue's director of operations Pam Musland, take a break from cleaning debris from the flood.