

Implementing a Farm Rescue

Farm Rescue aids Sorenson family

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By Michael Tidemann - Staff Writer , Estherville News

DICKENS - A combine tops a distant hill, clouds of bean chaff roiling in the distance. As the huge machine comes closer, swathing through this season's crop, the Sorenson family - Dan, Allison and Chad - watch. Despite the early wet and the midsummer heat, this is a good crop, easily into the low 50s. And who knows. The corn could be better.

This Thursday, Farm Rescue, a Jamestown, N.D.-based nonprofit dedicated to helping farmers in crisis, harvested the crop for the Sorensons after Chad was severely injured in a farm accident Aug. 25.

Ironically, it was when he was helping a neighbor that Chad was injured when he cleaning out a silage wagon and the beaters caught him and pulled him around the wagon.



Chad, Dan and Allison Sorenson contemplate the harvest by Farm Rescue

Unfortunately, Chad's accident was not unique. Thousands of farmers are injured every harvest - many severely - and Chad was the fourth family member involved in a farm accident since 2010.

According to Levi Wielenga, Farm Rescue volunteer from Sioux Center, the organization helps farmers in the Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and eastern Montana who have been injured or otherwise disabled and need help either planting or harvesting their crop. Farmers pay for fuel in the fall and fuel, seed and fertilizer in the spring.

RDO Equipment of Fargo, N.D./Moorhead, Minn. donates equipment. Other major sponsors are Walmart, Bremer Bank and The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

Usually, a friend or neighbor will refer a farmer to Farm Rescue which sends an application. A lot of donations come back to the organization from people that have been helped.

Since Bill Gross, a United Parcel Service 747 captain from Cleveland, N.D., founded Farm Rescue in 2005, the nonprofit has helped 245 farm families.

When Farm Rescue comes, it's a little bit like the Marines hitting a beachhead. Thanks to the donations and support of a lot of companies and people, the combines and tractor-trailers they bring are the best. And so are the people driving them.

It's the volunteers, though, who seem to receive the greatest reward.

"It's more blessed to give than it is to receive. I get to serve God, serve others and farm with my family," said Wielenga, an engineer for Burlington Northern which donates \$10,000 yearly to Farm Rescue.

While parts of North Dakota might see more wheat and sugar beets than corn and soybeans, it's thanks to people with a local farm background - like Wielenga - that Farm Rescue is able to call upon volunteer experts to help set machines. And volunteers come from all over - California, Virginia, Alaska and everywhere in between.

"We have a long list of potential ones that want to help," said Wielenga.

"It's pretty wonderful," said Elaine Sorenson, Chad's grandmother who lives in Spencer, watching the harvest. "We've been through a lot the last few weeks.

Allison, Chad's mother, said he had puncture wounds and a sprained foot and will undergo skin grafting next week.

"I think it's the best opportunity for sick people - to have these guys come do it," said Chad.

Allison takes a deep breath as a combine fills another trailer.

"It's overwhelming to see all this help."