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‘Such a stress relief’



Whitney Pandil-Eaton/MDN

Farmer **Warren Miller** and volunteers **Randy Weaver** of Shelbyville, Ky., and **Bruce Radloff** of Interlaken, N.Y., load canola into the seeder as farmer **Duane Jacques** looks on.



Whitney Pandil-Eaton/MDN

Recovering from triple bypass surgery in March, **Duane Jacques** and his wife **Nancy** received planting assistance from Farm Rescue in mid-May.



Whitney Pandil-Eaton/MDN

The Miller family from left, daughter **Ashley**, father **Warren**, mother **Kristi** and son **Ethan**. Farm Rescue is helping to plant 640 acres of canola for Warren, who is undergoing cancer treatment.

Farm Rescue helps farmers hit by illness seed fields

By **WHITNEY
PANDIL-EATON**
Staff Writer
wpandileaton@
minotdailynews.com

You wouldn't know by the way farmers Warren Miller and Duane Jacques leisurely update each other on planting progress and comment on the recent warm weather that these two men and their families were nearly torn apart by illness this year.

The only indication that something was amiss during the Tuesday afternoon lunch

gathering were three men identically dressed head to toe in blue - jeans, shirt and hat - and the Farm Rescue truck outside.

The nonprofit organization, which has helped 115 farm families devastated by illness or natural disaster to plant and harvest their crops over the last five years, was at the Miller farm near Newburg to help Warren, who is undergoing treatment for colon cancer, plant 640 acres of

"Having (Farm Rescue) help out, it's such a stress relief ... like you wouldn't believe," said Jacques' wife Nancy.

Last week, the same Farm Rescue group that was working at the Miller farm was in Kramer helping Jacques, who is recovering from triple bypass surgery, plant 575 acres of spring wheat.

After suffering through last year's harvest with excessive fatigue and a general feeling of uneasiness, Miller said he was relieved to finally learn in November what had afflicted him for months - cancer - but the surgery and months of chemotherapy afterward left this season's planting in doubt.

"Before I received my first (chemo) treatment, I was like bring it on, but after my fourth treatment I knew it was more than my world could handle," he said. "Neighbors offered to help, but with the current farm situation, everybody is doing as much as they can so it's hard to ask people to sacrifice and take food off their own table and put it on yours."

After speaking with friend Daniel Stratton, a fellow colon cancer patient who also received support from Farm Rescue, Miller applied for help and was accepted as the 20th family to receive seeding assistance this spring.

To help these farmers, who are often spread across a four-state area, Farm Rescue relies on a network of more than 50 local and national volunteers and the nearly 150 sponsors who help cover equipment, transportation and lodging costs.

"I put in about 1,000 hours per year, but the real heroes are the volunteers and the sponsors who keep everything going," said Farm Rescue founder Bill Gross, who was out at the Miller farm Tuesday helping his two volunteers prepare the equipment and run the tractor.

Although a fair number of the organization's volunteers are from North Dakota, the two volunteers helping out the Miller family traveled halfway across the country to help plant.

Along with his father and uncle, pilot Randy Weaver of Shelbyville, Ky., has for the past three years used his vacation time to come out to North Dakota for two weeks to help Farm Rescue plant or harvest crops.

"Everybody needs help and farming is such a critical thing - there's such a limited window of time - that it's nice to be able to help someone out," he said.



Whitney Pandil-Eaton/MDN

With John Deere equipment donated by RDO Equipment, Farm Rescue volunteers begin seeding 640 acres of canola Tuesday afternoon on the farm of Warren Miller, who is undergoing treatment for colon cancer. Between mid-April and early June, Farm Rescue volunteers will put in hundreds of hours behind the tractor to plant thousands of acres spread across three states.

After seeing a news segment about Farm Rescue on NBC's "The Today Show," technologist Bruce Radloff of Interlaken, N.Y., also felt the need to help.

"I'm from a farming family from northeast Iowa and I've had extended family members experience disasters where they lost their farms so I wanted to come out and meet some great people and help," he said. "It's been exactly what I hoped it would be and I will definitely be coming back, hopefully with a few more guys."

It's that kind of dedication from complete strangers that moves Miller the most.

"They give up their vacation time and time away from their family and friends, these people are just amazing," he said.