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Farm Rescue aim is just that as it expands into Minnesota

By **Tom Larson**
Sun Tribune

Farmers are always looking out for their neighbors, especially when illness or natural disasters hit a family.

But it's not easy today to be a Good Samaritan, as farms grow larger and the schedules tighter.

That's where Farm Rescue believes it can make a difference. And has.

"There are fewer family farms and fewer children on farms because they leave to get jobs," said Farm Rescue founder and president Bill Gross, who grew up on a farm near Jamestown, N.D. "I remember illness and injuries when I was on the farm, and I thought there should be a formal organization to help family farmers at a time of crisis."

Farm Rescue is a network of volunteers who will plant and harvest for free for farmers facing a crisis that takes them away from the fields.



Farm Rescue, a volunteer organization that helps plant and harvest for family farms suffering from illness or injury, planted beans on the Gerald and Anita Lindgren farm, near Hancock earlier this month. Photo courtesy Farm Rescue.

This month, Farm Rescue planted soybeans near Hancock for the Gerald and Anita Lindgren family while Anita battles cancer.

The group also planted beans on the Dave and Sara Edmunds farm near Starbuck. Sara suffered a stroke last fall, and Dave recently had open-heart surgery.

And Farm Rescue made its way to Ortonville to plant beans on the David and Shirley Reiffenberger farm after David had open-heart surgery.

Gross left the farm as a youth and is a captain who flies a Boeing 747 for UPS.

But his heart remained on the land, and he founded Farm Rescue almost four years ago. A board of directors runs the organization but all the field work is done by volunteers, Gross said.

Bremer Bank is helping Farm Rescue expand, contributing about \$51,000 a year as Farm Rescue now has branched out to cover all of the Dakotas and western Minnesota and eastern Montana, he said.

Walmart has contributed \$50,000 for both South Dakota and North Dakota, and RDO Equipment, in Fargo, supplies the John Deere equipment for Farm Rescue, Gross said.

Farm Rescue maintains a database of about 500 volunteers, with about 50 volunteers active at a time. Between four and six volunteers work on each case, Gross said.

Since its founding, Farm Rescue has helped 67 farmers with planting or harvesting. There are 22 cases in progress this year; and 15 were completed as of last week. Farm Rescue's goal is to reach 100 cases by the end of the year, Gross said.

Farm Rescue is not in the business of "hand outs," Gross said. "We don't give any money to farmers and it must be a viable farming operation. It's a lot of hard work."

Getting the word out about Farm Rescue is a priority since the group is working with an independent and self-sustaining group of people. About 50 percent of the applications that come into Farm Rescue are from people other than the ones who need help, Gross said.

"It's from family, friends or neighbors who are worried," Gross said. "Farmers are proud people, independent people, and they're used to doing things on their own. They don't often ask for help."

Gross encouraged anyone who needs help, or knows of someone who could use a helping hand, to contact Farm Rescue by calling (701) 252-2017, or by visiting Farm Rescue's Web site at www.farmrescue.org.