

# Farm Rescue Family

**Devoted Farm Rescue volunteers help save family farms.**

**G**ood-hearted. Kind. Passionate. Charitable. The words to describe volunteers are endless. The feeling you get when you selflessly give your time or resources to help a person in need is indescribable.

This is what the Farm Rescue volunteers have learned during the past eight years of service to farm families.

## LIFESAVERS

**W**hen a long-term illness, injury, or natural disaster has the potential to destroy what a family has worked hard to create, a visit from Farm Rescue volunteers can make a big difference to the farm.

“In some cases, it was literally a lifesaver for them,” says Bill Gross, president and founder of Farm Rescue. “They are in the hospital dealing with a major illness, and no one is able to do the work. It does make a difference. The crop gets in on time. It’s more money for them, and they can treat their medical injury. In other cases, it’s just helping them through a difficult time, which is good long term.”

Many cases have involved a child who is injured or ill, and the parents need to be with that child for surgery or treatment.

## DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

**G**ross and the Farm Rescue volunteers say that meeting families gives them an emotional sense of purpose. They also get satisfaction from planting and harvesting.

“You don’t have to pay the bills. You just get to drive,” says Charlie Bartsch, a devoted Farm Rescue volunteer.

Besides running the equipment, Bartsch often teaches other vol-

unteers how to run it, and they enjoy doing it as much as he does.

Pete Von Bank of Washburn, North Dakota, is another long-time volunteer. The retired power plant construction worker has a CDL license and transports the combine, tractor, and seeding equipment to farms, and he hauls grain to elevators. Like Bartsch, he heard about Farm Rescue from a neighbor, and he has been involved for four years. Over the years, both volunteers say they have met many families and local volunteers.

“It’s like one big extended Farm Rescue family,” Gross says, explaining that volunteers and farm families stay connected with the organization. An annual banquet reunites them and new farm family members of the class of the current year.

Gross is pleased that the organization is now active in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and most recently Iowa. With many willing volunteers, sponsors, and equipment, he is working hard to get the word out so Farm Rescue can help many families.

The process is simple. Contact Farm Rescue and fill out an application. Roughly half of the applications come from farmers and half come from neighbors or business owners who call and say they think a farm family could use help but won’t ask for it.

“Farm families are proud, independent people. That’s why they are farmers,” Gross says. “They are used to working on the land on their own, and they don’t want to ask for help.”

## EQUIPMENT SPONSOR

**G**ross’s passion and organized plan make it easy to get on board with equipment donations, says Todd Thompson, of RDO Equipment Co. based in Fargo, North Dakota. The company is the exclusive provider of the farm equipment.

RDO appreciates the all-volunteer structure of Farm Rescue. Other than three full-time and two part-time workers who staff offices for each state, no one is paid, including Gross, his board of directors, or the volunteers. Money that is contributed covers lodging, travel, and insurance expenses needed to move the teams of people and equipment to different farms. •

## LEARN MORE

[www.farmrescue.org](http://www.farmrescue.org)

**Charlie Bartsch, a retired crop farmer, has helped farm families through Farm Rescue for five years.**

