

RESCUE

Farm Rescue plants fields for Center farmer



6 HOURS AGO • [LAUREN DONOVAN BISMARCK TRIBUNE](#)

RURAL CENTER — Dale Barth was changing a tire on his pickup when, as he says, “Kapow!”

That comic-book action word doesn’t describe the damage done to Barth’s right hand, now stabilized with 38 pins and a brace and only beginning to heal a month after the tire blew while he was airing it up on the rim.

The explosion knocked him backward 15 feet, and four fingers bled and broke, all the bones in his hand broke, and the thumb on his left hand broke, also.

“It’s a good thing it didn’t knock me out because in five minutes it would have been all over,” he said.

He couldn’t turn an ignition key even with his left hand, but he was able to punch in the phone numbers for his daughter, Danica Krein in Center, who quickly called two neighbors to the scene.

By then, Barth’s hand was swollen into a frightening mess, so they hauled him to a hospital where, after five hours in surgery, he woke to the painful reality that he was going to need a lot of help to get through calving and crop planting this spring.

That was March 12. His nephew, Ken Dietz, returned to the farm to help with calving and hay-feeding, truly acting as his uncle’s right-hand man.

Then, on Wednesday, another right hand showed up at the farm. The biggest John Deere tractor manufactured last year, pulling the biggest seeder and the biggest seed and chemical cart pulled into the yard, gassed up and ready to rumble.

The big green machines, an in-kind donation from RDO Equipment, are flying the Farm Rescue flag and, by today, the rescue volunteers expected to have all 750 of Barth’s crop acres planted to wheat.

Farm Rescue is a nonprofit started in 2006 to help ill, injured or disaster-stricken farmers and, since then, has helped 300 upper Great Plains farmers with spring or fall’s work.

Barth, 63, figured he could have managed his own equipment once it was in the field, but he couldn’t have done any of the rigging up and fueling to get it there and keep it going.

His daughter brought her two girls out from school to watch the Farm Rescue work the field

and said seeing the volunteers at work was truly a relief.

"It hasn't been an easy month; actually, it's been heartbreaking," she said. "It's hard for Dad to ask for help. In fact, I don't think he would have asked."

She and her sister called Farm Rescue, and project coordinator Carol Wielenga said it worked to help Barth after leaving the George and Sue Buchmeier farm in Scranton. George Buchmeier got thrown up against a building by a cow and suffered a severe tear to his rotator cuff, a tendon and muscle group in the shoulder. After Barth's ground is seeded, the rescue will move on to an operation in McClusky, where another farmer needs help, she said.

Carol Wielenga said the organization is still accepting applications for planting assistance this spring.

"As long as we can fit it in on the route," she said.

So far, 15 of 20 scheduled rescues this year are in North Dakota.

She said it's been a good spring to get going early because fields aren't wet and muddy like last year.

Levi Wielenga manages the equipment side of Farm Rescue, taking unpaid weeks off from his job at BNSF Railway.

"It's been fun to get to know Dale. He's a character," Levi Wielenga said.

Farm Rescue will help a farmer with a one-time disaster, not year after year.

"It's a hand up, not a hand out," he said.

Levi Wielenga said he loves the work, even on days such as Thursday when a brisk southerly wind made for raw and chilly conditions in the field.

"This way I can serve God, serve others and farm," he said.

The equipment was running smoothly, and Barth could see that his worries were being laid to rest, seed by seed, row by row. The crop will grow while he's in physical therapy and, hopefully, come harvest, he can be his own right hand again.

"This," he said, nodding out to the equipment, "is so important. Without it, we'd be running our butts off."