



“Since 1976, Where Farm and Family Meet”

THE LAND



March 24, 2017

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Farm Rescue



**Volunteers take to the field
to help those in need**

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Farm Rescue sends volunteers to plant, harvest

By MARIE WOOD
The Land Associate Editor

In June 2014, John Dubbels, who farms near Fergus Falls, Minn., was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome, a blood and bone marrow cancer. He had just turned 60.

Treatment required chemotherapy followed by a bone marrow stem cell transplant in October. With his wife, Sheree, He stayed in Rochester, near Mayo Clinic, for 100 days of treatment and monitoring. Be the Match found Dubbels a donor in Europe.

Dubbels farms with his brother who works full time. Together they do all the harvesting.

"We weren't sure what to do and what was going to happen," said Dubbels.

A neighbor contacted Farm Rescue and told them the Dubbels could use some help.

Farm Rescue, in Horace, N.D., provides planting, harvesting and haying assistance to farm families that have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster. The Dubbels were approved for assistance.



Photo submitted by Farm Rescue

Bill Gross founded Farm Rescue in 2005 to help farm families with planting, harvesting and haying when they have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster.

"About half of the cases we help are referrals from other people. A lot of rural folk are independent and hard workers and they don't want to ask for help," said Bill Gross, Farm Rescue founder.

Gross called Dubbels to tell him Farm Rescue would take care of his corn harvest and that their farm would be the organization's 300th rescue.

"It was a big wow. My prayers were answered I guess," said Dubbels.

Farm Rescue combined their corn the first week of November. Volunteers traveled from as far away as Arizona and Farm Rescue brought in a big

combine and a couple of semis. The Dubbels provided an additional semi and grain cart.

Dubbels is still farming today with his brother and a hired hand that helped with harvest in 2014. While he is cancer-free, he is at a higher risk to get cancer again.

"You don't want to dwell on that," he said. "You just gotta go on, I guess."

Founder

Bill Gross is the UPS pilot who founded Farm Rescue. He planted the first seed of Farm Rescue on April 11, 2006, at the farm of Matt and Laura Beil near LeFor, N.D. A month earlier, Matt Beil, 32 years old, lost his hand in a grain auger accident. They had two small children at the time.

Gross began his mission with a handful of volunteers and some sponsored equipment. Today, Farm Rescue has 1,000 volunteers from across the nation. They serve North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Montana.

"There are a lot of good-hearted people that have come forward to help us out," said Gross.

In 2006, Farm Rescue helped 10 farm families. In 2016, a four-person staff mobilized hundreds of volunteers and equipment to help 60 farm families – roughly 400 farm families in a decade.

Farm Rescue brings in big equipment – tractors, balers, air seeders, combines and planters – and volunteers work day and night. For the first

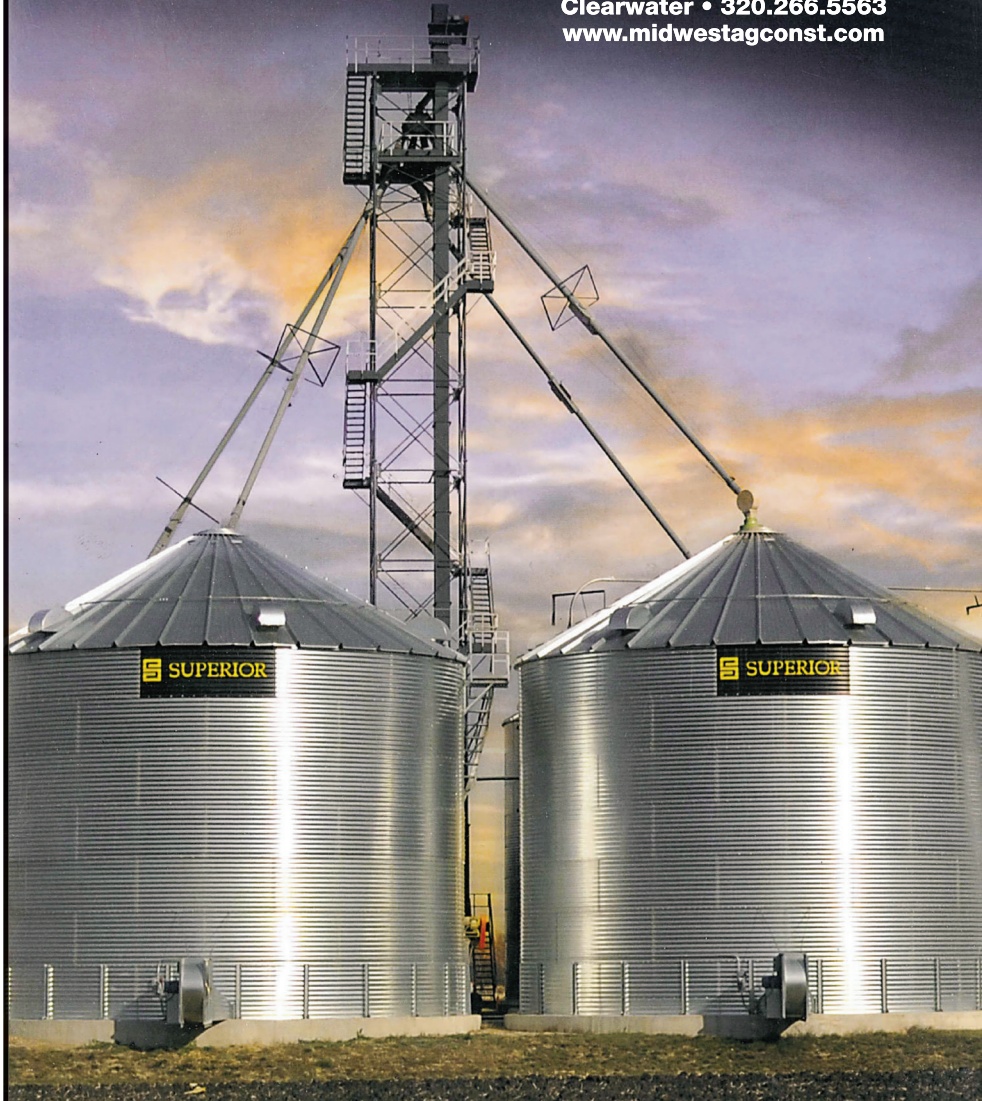
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Volunteers are rewarded by appreciation of farm families

FARM RESCUE, from pg. 8

five years, Gross drove equipment.

"We may plant one farm in 24 hours, what would take one farmer two to three weeks to get done," said Gross. "They are just amazed."

Families must apply for assistance and the board reviews each application.

"We like to help the small to medium true family farm," said Gross. "We are just trying to help your family farms maintain their livelihood when they are stricken by injury, medical illness or natural disaster."

Gross also started the Farm Rescue Foundation, in part to help farm families after Farm Rescue has left. When a farmer loses a limb or is paralyzed, the foundation pays for equipment to help them keep farming. For instance, a lift can make it possible for a paralyzed farmer to get in the tractor. The foundation does not provide prosthesis.

"We pay for those things so those farm families can still have productive, fulfilling lives and maintain their livelihood," said Gross.

Gross grew up on a 5,000 head cattle farm near Cleveland, N.D., the youngest of five children. Over the years, Gross watched neighbors helping neighbors, but there were fewer family farms and not as many children staying on the farm. He also knew that farmers were getting older so more illnesses and injuries were likely.

"My heart never left the rural farming community," said Gross.

In retirement, Gross planned to buy a John Deere tractor and be a random Good Samaritan. He would start at one end of the state and pull into a different farmstead every morning to help out. "I wanted to return to my roots," said Gross.

A friend asked: "Why wait for retirement?" He suggested screening and identifying farmers in crisis. The result was Farm Rescue. Gross is most proud of the long term rewards for farm families.

"It makes it more likely for future generations to continue. That's near and dear to my heart because I wasn't able to continue," said Gross.

Gross' parents had financial challenges in the 1980s and told him to go to college and get off the farm. While

Farm Rescue

Online: www.farmrescue.org

What: Planting, harvesting and hay ing assistance free of charge to family farmers who have suffered a major injury, illness or natural disaster

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Get Involved: Apply for assistance, volunteer or donate online

he loves being a pilot, Gross still owns farmland today.

Volunteers

As a volunteer, Robert Stoltman planted roughly 1,400 acres of corn and soybeans and harvested 500 acres of corn over 20 days on seven different farms in 2014 alone.



Robert Stoltman

Stoltman, owns and operates Stoltman Insurance and Investments agency in Rice, Minn., and also has a crop farm. Growing up on a farm, he always wanted to operate the large machinery.

"Within short order, I was running it and doing things that were very helpful," said Stoltman.

Stoltman takes time off from his business to work for several days in western Minnesota and the eastern Dakotas. On pheasant opener 2014, he harvested corn near Conde, S.D. The farmer had one arm in a sling and traveled 30 miles to Aberdeen, S.D., every day for a four hour antibiotic treatment for a shoulder infection.

Stoltman drove the farmer's combine for five days, mostly from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The crew included a volunteer truck driver from Illinois and a hired hand. Neighbors helped too. After daily treatments, the farmer would drive the semi with his free hand. In five days, they pulled out 80 semi-loads of corn with one machine and three trucks.

The farmer told Stoltman, "You can come out any day and help me out."

"We just cried on each other's shoulders a little bit," said Stoltman. "That's what we were there for, to help him out just for that short term."



Photo submitted by Robert Stoltman

Robert Stoltman worked a corn harvest near Spencer, Iowa, in the fall of 2012. The farmer was recovering from heart surgery.

Henry "Skip" and Bonnie Henton, of Truman, Minn., also joined Farm Rescue. Henton, a semi-retired farmer and truck driver, saw Farm Rescue billboards and learned volunteers with commercial driver's licenses were

needed.

"I've met some awfully nice people – both the volunteers and the people that we help. They are so appreciative of what we've done for them," said Henton. ❖

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