

“There are farmers who need some assistance, through no fault of their own, and Farm Rescue can help.”

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Staying positive

■ Farm Rescue helps Finley, N.D., farmer who is fighting leukemia

By Jonathan Knutson

Agweek Staff Writer

FINLEY, N.D. — Bruce Lundstrom knows he can't control the rain during combining season. He focuses instead on having the combine ready to go when the weather allows.

He's using the same approach in his fight against leukemia.

“Getting this disease wasn't something I had any control over. But what I can control is keeping a positive attitude,” he says.

Lundstrom, who farms near Finley, is among the area farmers being aided this spring by Farm Rescue. The nonprofit Jamestown, N.D.-based organization helps with planting and harvesting for area farmers

struggling with injury, illness or natural disaster.

“There are farmers who need some assistance, through no fault of their own, and Farm Rescue can help,” says Bill Gross, the organization's founder and president.

Gross, a native North Dakotan and full-time pilot for UPS Airlines, started Farm Rescue in 2005. The organization, which has helped more than 100 farm families in North Dakota, South Dakota, western Minnesota and eastern Montana, has been covered by the national news media.



▲ **Bill Gross** is president and founder of Farm Rescue.



Jonathan Knutson, Agweek staff

◀ Farm Rescue, based in Jamestown, N.D., has helped to plant or harvest the crops of more than 100 area farmers struggling with injury, illness or natural disaster.



Jonathan Knutson, Agweek staff

► **Bruce Lundstrom and his wife, Anona, grow wheat and soybeans near Finley, N.D. Bruce is battling leukemia this spring. The Farm Rescue program recently helped plant some of their wheat.**



Jonathan Knutson, Agweek staff

Bruce Radloff, a digital mapping consultant in Interlaken, N.Y., who has family ties to Iowa farms, is volunteering his time this spring with Farm Rescue. He learned of the organization after his wife read an article about it in People magazine.

“We have farms in upstate New York (where he lives), but the size is so much bigger here,” he says of the North Dakota farms on which he’s helped.

Help from volunteers

Farm Rescue relies on volunteers from both the region and the entire country, Gross says.

Farm Rescue is funded by donations from businesses, organizations and individuals.

RESCUE: See Page 25

▲ **Steve Bettenhausen of Fingal, N.D., a volunteer with the Farm Rescue program, helps to plant wheat on the Bruce and Anona Lundstrom farm near Finley, N.D.**

REGIONAL NEWS

RESCUE

Continued from Page 24

RDO Equipment Co., based in Fargo, N.D., donates the John Deere farm equipment used by Farm Rescue.

RDO stresses long-term relationships with its customers, and Farm Rescue is a way to foster that, says Jim Huseth, a sales coordinator with the company.

He's helped out on Farm Rescue planting teams this spring, although he wasn't among the volunteers at Lundstrom's farm.

Reluctant, but grateful

The 61-year-old Lundstrom connected with Farm Rescue through his brother, who was familiar with the organization.

Bruce Lundstrom and his wife, Anona, who is active on the farm, accepted help reluctantly.

"It feels like something we should be doing ourselves," Anona says.

Bruce, who followed his grandfather and father on the family farm, has been farming himself since 1976. He and Anona have been married for 37 years.

But the Lundstroms had little choice but to accept help after his leukemia kept him in a Fargo, N.D., hospital for 69 days last fall. Doctors struggled to find a type of treatment that would send his disease into remission.

Neighbors ended up harvesting much of

the Lundstroms' crop last year. Finley Farmers Grain & Elevator also helped by accepting wet grain, Anona says.

"There were just so many people who helped," she says. "And to have Farm Rescue here now means a lot."

Farm Rescue wanted to help the Lundstroms last fall, but scheduling problems and topsy-turvy weather prevented it, Gross says.

On the rebound

Doctors at the University of Minnesota eventually came up with a promising treatment plan, and Bruce received a bone marrow transplant Dec. 24.

"That was quite a Christmas present," he says.

Bruce says his health has been improving steadily since then.

"I feel better all the time. My strength is coming back," he says.

Farm Rescue planted some of the Lundstroms' wheat. Bruce plans to help his wife plant the rest, as well as their soybeans, although his role in planting will be smaller than usual.

This summer, he'll be watching both his crops and his medical condition.

He's optimistic about both.

"I really think I'm going to be OK," he says.

Information: www.farmrescue.org or 701-252-2017.

► Bruce Lundstrom (right) farms near Finley, N.D., and is battling leukemia. He visits here with Bruce Radloff, an Interlaken, N.Y., resident who volunteered to help Lundstrom plant some of his wheat through the Farm Rescue program.



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