

Farm Rescue helps Balfour family bring in their harvest

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BALFOUR - When Laura Duchsherer woke up after she was seriously injured in a vehicle accident this summer, the first thing she thought about was how was her family going to get its farm work done.

Farm Rescue answered Laura's concerns.

This week, Farm Rescue volunteers Bill Krumwiede, of Voltaire, Warren Zakopyko, of Balfour, and Gene Spichke, of Kief arrived at the Duchsherer land with the Farm Rescue equipment to combine the Duchsherers' crops, starting Tuesday with a field of barley near Kief. Two more Farm Rescue volunteers, brothers from Alabama and Illinois, arrived later Tuesday.

Article Photos



Eloise Ogden/MDN • **Laura Duchsherer**, center, is surrounded by family members Tuesday afternoon for a photo in front of the Farm Rescue combine in the Duchsherers' field near Kief. Family members are, from the left, Laura's dad, **Ralph Duchsherer**; her brother, **Tyler**; **Laura**; her grandmother, **Magdalena Duchsherer**; Laura's mother, **Marsha Duchsherer**; and Laura's first cousin, **Hilary Feist**, holding **Leo Feist**, 2. In back are Farm Rescue volunteers, from the left, **Bill Krumwiede**, **Warren Zakopyko** and **Gene Spichke**.

Laura, who lives on a farm near Balfour with her family, will be a junior at Drake-Anamoose High School in Drake this year.

After the June 29 accident, two workers were missing from the Duchsherer farming operation Laura and her mother, Marsha.

"We're a big part of the farm. With two hands out, it makes it tough because I always drove truck and Laura would help unload," Marsha said.

Laura said her dad and brother Tyler, 12, often were away from the farm to come to the hospital. Jeri McQuade, Laura's sister from Fargo, also spent as much time as she could with them there.

Then Jennifer Posey, who works for Hefty Brothers, a seed company in Harvey and who is a close friend of the Duchsherer family, got the idea to contact Farm Rescue.

Farm Rescue is a nonprofit, Jamestown-based organization that helps farm families facing an unexpected crisis because of a major illness, injury or natural disaster. Founded by North Dakotan Bill Gross and launched several years ago, the organization provides free planting or harvesting to those families. The organization has helped about 200 farm families in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota and Montana. Recently, the organization announced it is expanding to Iowa.

While Laura was hospitalized in Rochester, Minn., Posey contacted Farm Rescue to check if the Duchsherers qualified for the program.

"She was the go-getter on Farm Rescue that got the application going," Marsha said. That was in early July.

"That was one of the first things that came into my mind when I woke up from everything and I realized 'like what's going to happen on the farm?' " Laura said, in an interview Tuesday afternoon in a barley field near Kief.

"Me and Mom and Ty and Dad we always did things together like how is it going to work now that I'm hurt and Dad is coming to see me all the time? And how are the crops going to be done? And it's going to be like the most stress that they've ever had. It just bugged me for a long time. And then Jennifer came and said that they were talking about doing that, and tears came to my eyes. I mean, that means the world to me that they would do that," Laura said.

Tuesday afternoon, Farm Rescue volunteers began combining a barley field for the Duchsherer family. They would also be combining canola, Laura said. The volunteers were expected to be there for about a week combining 700 acres of canola and 600 acres of barley near Kief and Balfour.

"Oh, it's amazing," Laura said, sitting in the van watching the Farm Rescue combining operation. "It's helping out a lot. It's hard to express how thankful I am that they'd come out here and do this for us. I realize there are families that are a lot worse off than we are, but I mean this is big help."

"If it wouldn't be for them, we would never get our harvest done. There's no way that my son and I can handle this. We were a whole family operation here," Ralph said.

Ralph was aware of Farm Rescue through the media but said he never thought they'd be receiving help from the organization. "It's a godsend," he said, adding, "They're willing to help."

The Farm Rescue volunteers there that afternoon also were people the family knows.

"I've known them for years," Ralph said.

Would he be a volunteer, too, someday? "I wouldn't mind it a bit," Ralph said.

Krumwiede was Farm Rescue's first volunteer, but Spichke and Zakopyko also have been with Farm Rescue for a number of years.

"It's really great to see them come out they're really kind," Tyler said.

Soon, more family members arrived at the field Laura's grandmother, Magdalena Duchsherer, of Drake, and Laura's first cousin, Hilary Feist, of Mandan, and her two children, Leo, 2, and Sierra, 5 months. Hilary spent much time this summer with Laura and her mother at the hospital and is now helping with Laura's care at home.

"We're very happy to have them here," Magdalena said.

"It means the world to them," she added, referring to her son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

"The Duchsherer family has a true family farm, the kind of farming operation that Farm Rescue strives to assist during times of crises," said Gross, Farm Rescue founder and pilot who now flies for UPS out of Anchorage, Alaska. "We are pleased to help the Duchsherer family so they may focus on recovery of their daughter's health and continue their livelihood as a family farm. We thank our sponsors and volunteers for making it possible for us to help them."

Laura and her mother explained what happened when Laura was injured.

They said Laura was run over by a pickup on June 29 in Drake at the Ranch Rodeo.

Laura suffered severe injuries including hip and pelvis fractures, and her knee was totally dislocated. She also had to have a splenectomy.

"I can walk with crutches, I can get around and get where I need to be. I can't walk very far because I can't put any weight on my foot," Laura said, adding, "I have a couple more surgeries coming up in October."

After the accident Laura first was taken to St. Aloisius Medical Center in Harvey, then to Trinity Hospital in Minot and to St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minn., where she was in the intensive care unit for 10 days and then moved to a floor room. After that she was transferred to St. Alexius Medical Center in Bismarck for rehabilitation.

"My family and friends could visit me there," Laura said, when she was transferred to the Bismarck hospital.

Laura returned home July 23.

"I got home just in time to go to the State Fair," she said.

Laura's sister and brother took her sheep to the fair and close friends showed them for her.

"We thank everyone from the bottom of our hearts the whole family," said Marsha of all the support they have received.

"I wouldn't have been able to make it through without all of this support and prayers. Everything has just helped me a lot. It helps me keep my positive attitude that I will get better," Laura said.