

Help for farms in crisis

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There wasn't a dry eye in the house at the kickoff event of this year's AMC Engineering Conference in Waterloo, IA. All it took was a 30-minute video of a farm family in North Dakota. One of the sons, struck by a devastating disease similar to MS, is shown in a wheelchair after losing much of his muscle control. A year later, his younger sister was diagnosed with the same disease. Yet, there were crops to plant and wheat to harvest. And the financial stability of the farm was on a downward spiral.

That's where Farm Rescue steps in. Volunteers and staff from this non-profit organization showed up with a combine to help harvest their wheat crop. In a subsequent season, after the family suffered the second illness, Farm Rescue showed up again, this time to plant.

The North Dakota family is just one of the 250 farm families Farm Rescue has helped since 2006, when founder Bill Gross, an airline pilot, came up with the idea of starting a non-profit organization to help farm families in crisis, defined as those who have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster. Fifty farm families were helped last year alone. Operations are funded solely by donations, grants and sponsorships.



Jacob Bolson, one of the organizers at this year's AMC Engineering Conference, awards program speaker Faron Wahl, Farm Rescue, a commemorative Case IH tractor.

Faron Wahl, Regional Operations Manager of Farm Rescue, spoke at the kick-off event of the AMC Engineering Conference, held earlier this month at the Convention Center in downtown Waterloo, IA. Agricultural engineers attend this annual meeting to learn about the latest design trends and technologies that are bettering the farm equipment you buy.

Jacob Bolson, an ASABE member who helped organize the event, said Farm Rescue is the perfect example of how agricultural machinery engineers are designing highly

efficient, high-tech farm machinery that helps farmers of all sizes meet their short planting and harvesting deadlines.

“The public perception of farming often is tied to the corporate farm, which gets a bad name,” Bolson says. “Farm Rescue shows us the good side of agriculture, which is about farm families who are the real people in agriculture.

RDO Equipment in North Dakota provides the equipment used by Farm Rescue. The current fleet is made up of three high-horsepower tractors, three planting units, two combines, and, as of this year, baling equipment to do haying. Farm Rescue employees and volunteers do the driving.

Farm Rescue is looking for additional volunteers or sponsorships to support the organization, which to date consists of 700 or 800 volunteers from California, New York, Georgia, Kentucky and all states in between. Or, if you know of a family who needs some help, please send in an application. For now, the areas served are North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and eastern Montana. Any farmer who has suffered a major illness, injury or natural disaster qualifies for help. Applications are currently being accepted for the 2014 planting season, which can be obtained at 701-252-2017 or www.farmrescue.org.