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Farm Rescue plants soybeans for Atyeos



The big John Deere equipment of Farm Rescue was ready to roll in the bean field at the Chuck Atyeo farm.

When the big rig dropped the John Deere equipment of Farm Rescue at the Chuck and Pam Atyeo farm Friday, it was planned that they would seed 300 plus acres of soybeans and be rolling to their next stop on Saturday. Rain and a computer glitch put them a bit behind that schedule, but they completed the job for which the Atyeos were grateful.

Farm Rescue is a nonprofit organization started by a North Dakota farm kid to help farmers in crisis situations. For Chuck Atyeo, it was a medical crisis. After heart bypass surgery and some complications, he was not able to lend his hands as he had done for many years at the farm east of Clear Lake.

Son Nathan was willing but seeding the beans was more than he could handle alone, too. That's when Farm Rescue stepped in.

The organization is manned by volunteers except for two paid employees at the office in Jamestown, ND. Bill Gross is the ND farm kid who came up with the idea for the helping hands for farmers and the idea turned into something monumental.

Gross is a pilot for UPS and flies 747s around the world. Those trips leave much time for conversation while in the air. That conversation turned to retirement on one trip, and he told his fellow crew members that he was going to buy a tractor and equipment and go around like a Good Samaritan planting for farmers who needed a hand.



Bill Gross calibrated the 42 foot air seeder for crew member Smokey Wright, who took the first shift for the operation.

He had been on many mission trips in other countries, but felt there was something he could do here.

The pilot remembered neighbors helping neighbors while he was a kid, but that situation is different today. “There aren’t as many neighbors,” he said. He thinks farms today have gotten to the point where the operator has just enough time for his own work.

He received encouragement from a former college roommate to think bigger and Farm Rescue was born. It has grown to having two crews working the planting and harvesting seasons using new equipment donated by RDO, a large John Deere dealer. The crews travel the Upper Midwest helping farmers who have applied for their assistance. Plans are in place for three crews next year.

Other large sponsors of Farm Rescue include Wal-Mart of Brookings, Watertown and Sioux Falls and Dacotah Banks and a big list of other businesses as well as individuals.

“Nathan sent in the application,” said Chuck Atyeo. He noted Judith Homan gave it to them and thought it was a good idea. The organization’s goal is to help viable small to medium size farm operations who face a crisis – usually medical or a force of nature.

From the applicants, the organization interviews those it feels it can be helped and then may proceed. They interviewed Chuck Atyeo while he was in the hospital and a week later the family was approved.

The farmer provides the fuel, seed and fertilizer and Farm Rescue the equipment. “We did have the fields ready,” said Atyeo.

Before the field work began, a blessing of seed, soil and the sowers was led by the Atyeos’ daughter and son-in-law, Revs. Laura and Dan Overboe of Volga. Pastor Dennis Hansen of the



Bill Gross, Farm Rescue founder, watched the equipment at work. His organization’s pickup displays the names of many of the sponsors.

Atyeos' church, St. Paul's Lutheran, was there as was a pastor from the Twin Cities on a week's duty with the Farm Rescue crew.

After the blessing, the tractor hit the dirt. Progress was swift until rain hit later Friday. Operations came to a halt and resumed Saturday. However, those were held up by a computer glitch on the 42 foot air seeder drill. Once corrected, progress was swift.

Leaving the Clear Lake area, the Farm Rescue crew headed for Bristol to help another farmer in bad straits.

"For someone 42 years old, who flies all over the world, to give up his vacations to help... that's amazing," said Atyeo about Bill Gross.

Gross sets up the equipment, calibrates it and gets another crew member in the cab and in the field. "Bill drives the night shift though," noted Chuck.

"It was a wonderful deal," said Chuck. "It took a big load off the spring for my son and the worry off me."

Interested persons can follow the progress of the Farm Rescue crews by accessing the organization's website: www.farmrescue.org.



The cross at the field entrance on the Atyeo farm symbolized the mission of Farm Rescue. A blessing of the seed, soil and sowers conducted by the Atyeo's daughter and son-in-law, pastors, preceded the startup of the equipment.