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Farm Rescue in Area

BY: Lori Jo Mundstock

Farm Rescue, a non-profit organization that provides assistance to farm families in North Dakota, South Dakota, western Minnesota and eastern Montana was in Hand County on Friday, April 16, at the farm of Rod and Becky Fortune offering a helping hand.

Farm Rescue founder Bill Gross, a farm boy at heart and native North Dakotan, came up with the idea for Farm Rescue while working as a full-time pilot for UPS Airlines.

Flying back and forth across our nation at 40,000 feet, Bill kept looking at the farms below and always in the back of his mind, he remembered his father's concern about what would happen to their farm should anything debilitating happen.

So, on a long flight over the Pacific Ocean one day, when one of Bill's co-pilots asked him what he was going to do when he retired, Bill didn't hesitate: "I'm going to be this Good Samaritan that buys a tractor and goes around and helps farm families plant their crops." When the initial laughter died down and the coworker realized he was serious he challenged Bill saying, "Why wait till you retire?"

Bill Gross launched Farm Rescue in 2005.

Farm Rescue provides planting and harvesting assistance to farm families that have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster and state their mission as "Helping family farmers bridge crisis so they can continue on with viable operations."

For the Fortunes, located 8 miles out of Rockham, Farm Rescue was just what they needed.

After a seizure on January 7 compelled her doctors to do follow-up testing, Becky and Rod found themselves in Rochester on January 9 beginning on a journey that will forever change their lives. Further testing revealed a diagnosis of stage 4 melanoma. The oncologist told them it was classified as incurable but Becky says, "Bulls***, we're fighting it!" and fight she has.

Becky has undergone a surgery to remove a large tumor in her brain, gamma knife radiology for a smaller tumor towards the back of her brain in addition to brain radiation and chemotherapy. And through it all, Becky and Rod have had the support of their families, friends, neighbors, and their faith in God.



Charles Bartsch, volunteer with Farm Rescue, works planting spring wheat on the Rod and Becky Fortune farm, Friday, April 16. Photo by Lori Jo Mundstock

A new puppy named Faith shows how strongly they cling to theirs in the midst of their trials. A post by Becky on the family's Caring Bridge site January 16 says, "Well, it has been a long scary road and I'm gonna just start out singing thanks and praises. First of all I want to thank God. He guided the surgeon's hands when he got all the tumor in the one part of the brain."



Charles Bartsch, volunteer with Farm Rescue, and Becky and Rod Fortune laugh about farming and its challenges.

Photo by Lori Jo Mundstock

A post on April 6 announces that "The tumors have been contained and some shrunk by 10%. Praise the Lord!"

Just ten days later Becky is out driving the fields with her puppy Faith in the cab of the truck as we go to find the Farm Rescue volunteer who is planting 160 acres of spring wheat to help decrease the work load on the family. Becky returned to work earlier in the week at the Post Office in Miller and on Saturday, April 17, got to ride her horse and sort out pairs from the pregnant cows.

A journey that will still have ups and downs for Becky, Rod, and their children, 5-year-old Gus and 3-year-old Reed, but one made a little easier

thanks to the helping hands of Farm Rescue and so many others.

A benefit account has been set up to assist with expenses. Donations can be made to Wells Fargo, c/o Rebecca Fortune Benefit Account located at 25 West 6th Ave., Redfield, SD 57469. Becky's Caring Bridge link is www.caringbridge.org/visit/beckyfortune.