

# Volunteers to the rescue

## Farm Rescue took pressure off for injured dairyman

By Mikkel Pates

Agweek Staff Writer

PELICAN RAPIDS, Minn. — For several seconds, Travis Tollerud thought he was a goner.

It was Jan. 7, a Monday morning, and he went to start a Case 1070 tractor that runs the Haybuster hay processor at his dairy farm near Pelican Rapids, Minn. There were three tractors standing side-by-side in a row.

Tollerud, 33, a 6-foot-3-inch, strapping dairy and crop farmer, had gone to start up a tractor like he'd done hundreds of times before. He turned the key but it wouldn't start, so he crossed the solenoid — technically a dangerous thing to do — but he was standing out of the way. He thought he'd checked to see if it was in neutral, but the tractor has 15,000 hours on it and is 40 years old, so the linkage is loose. He watched it for

about 45 seconds, unaware the hydraulic pump hadn't kicked in. He thought everything was safe.

"I walked in front of it, not thinking twice," he says. Suddenly, the tractor was coming at him. He turned 90 degrees and it crushed him front to back between it and a truck. The tractor pushed the truck 25 feet, and was pushing two vehicles backward. Unable to extricate himself, he thought he was a dead man.

Inexplicably, the tractor popped into neutral. Later, rescue officials reckoned that the bale processor tire got caught on the tire of the tractor next to it.

"I was able to fall or get to the ground," Tollerud says. "I just laid with my head under the pickup, my feet under the tractor. I thought if it took off again it would miss me. I also knew there was fair impact on my spine and I didn't want to move my feet and risk paralyzing myself."

He was able to reach his cell phone. He tried calling family phone numbers, but his brother was on a rare trip outside the region and others didn't an-



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◀ Travis and Mandy Tollerud say they were happy that Farm Rescue came to help them. Despite severe pelvic injuries, Tollerud thought he'd figure out a way to get the 2013 crop planted, but the Farm Rescue help took some of the pressure off him and his family.

Then he went to Mayville (N.D.) State University for a semester "to play basketball," he says. He transferred to Concordia College, where he studied accounting while continuing farming. At home, he sold hay as a cash crop and went to school in the winter.

He graduated in December 2003 and came home to farm.

Tollerud's father, Don, had raised his family on a farm that consisted of 45 cows and 400 acres of farmland. When Travis came home, the family started adding land. Eventually, Travis' brother, Brent, five years younger, came into the operation. A sister, Kara, also lives in Pelican Rapids and helps out.

The workload has increased over the

swer immediately. He called 911 and the sheriff, and Rothsay (Minn.) First Responders arrived within minutes.

He was saved.

## Not used to impairment

Tollerud isn't the kind of fellow who is accustomed to physical impairment. He graduated in 1998 from Pelican Rapids High School, where he played basketball. After graduation, he stayed home and worked with his parents for two years.

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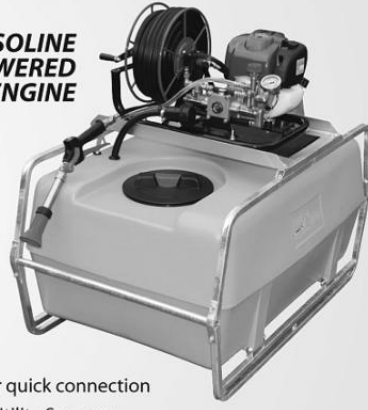
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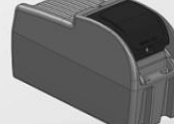
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## RESCUE

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years. The Tolleruds have gone to milking 200 cows. They milk at one location, keep the young heifers on a brother's land, and the bred heifers and dry cows at his father's.

**A common resistance**

After the accident, Tollerud was in the hospital for three weeks. His pelvis was broken in four places. His bladder was torn. One vertebra was chipped and the sacral — the bone just above the tail bone — was fractured.

He lay in bed for two months. In March, he was in a wheelchair, and started trying to walk on March 21. He was on crutches after that, and had a 25-pound lifting restriction.

"You can't do any work with that," he says. He was "fairly limited" until late May. "I'm getting back," he says. "I'm trying to get off these pain medications. You don't need pain medications if you sit around. But that's tough to do when you're busy."

His wife Mandy says a coworker had suggested the family contact Farm Rescue. Even after a long hospital stay, Tollerud didn't think he should take the help. He had a strong family, and surely other farmers with injury and illness would need it more. He was one of the last farmers to apply,



Mikkel Pates, Agweek

▲ Farm Rescue, based in Jamestown, N.D., planted about 200 acres of soybeans on the Travis Tollerud farm near Pelican Lake, Minn., on June 7.

and he was the nearly last of 30 cases to get help in a very tough spring.

Bill Gross, who founded Farm Rescue, is glad he applied. The organiza-

tion has a committee to decide who needs help, he says. "Don't assume someone else needs the help more," Gross says.

The team came to Tollerud's about May 4 and — like other farmers in the area — had to wait for dry conditions. Volunteers had expected to plant about 350 acres but ended up doing about 200.

"It was a very tough spring with the late start," Gross tells *Agweek*. "It was just a very short spring because of the late snowstorms and the constant rain the past few weeks. Very challenging."

Still, about 30 to 40 volunteers put in 15,000 to 20,000 acres this spring, he estimates. Farm Rescue had moved into Iowa last year, but is handling cases throughout the Dakotas, eastern Montana and Minnesota.

Volunteers this year at the Tolleruds' farm were from Iowa, Kentucky and right next door in Hitterdal, N.D. Because of Farm Rescue, there "never was a pressure of how we were going to get this done, because we knew they were coming," Tollerud says.

Mandy is glad to see her tall husband strengthen again. It has been an unbelievable experience.

"As a farm wife, you always have that in the back of your head," Mandy says. "You think that's never going to happen, that you're going to be the one that gets the call." She thinks of it as a dangerous profession. She doesn't think her husband's accident was negligence, but "just bad luck."

Gross says the Farm Rescue organization is already accepting applications for harvest help. He expects the organization will help 15 to 18 farmers this fall.

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