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## **Farmers to the rescue**

Nonprofit group helps Larimore farmer diagnosed with leukemia

By Brandi Jewett

LARIMORE, N.D. — Robert Stover, 61, has farmed all his life in the Larimore, N.D., area but this year has proven to be one of the most difficult.

A soggy spring delaying planting is the least of his worries. Stover is battling chronic lymphocytic leukemia — a type of cancer that results in an overproduction of white blood cells. The extra cells crowd out healthy ones in Stover's blood and bone marrow.

Stover worried his condition would leave him unable to contribute to his family's farm operation as much as he had in the past.

That's where an organization called Farm Rescue entered the picture. Farm Rescue assists in planting, harvesting and haying activities for family farm operations affected by illness, injury or natural disasters.

The group has helped about 270 families since its inception in 2006, said Regional Operations Manager Faron Wahl.

"When we leave and they see that crop in the fields, you can see a significant weight come off their shoulders," Wahl said.

### **Planting beans**

After filling out an application, Stover had his farm accepted as one of 50 in North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa and eastern Montana that Farm Rescue will assist this year.

A three-man volunteer crew consisting of Wahl, his father Jim Wahl and Roger Aldstadt arrived Tuesday with a tractor and air seeder and began planting soybeans.

They're part of a network of 700 to 800 volunteers from nearly 20 states.

Aldstadt traveled from Perham, Minn., to help with the planting while the Wahls drove up from South Dakota.

With only 160 of the 800 acres Stover had assigned to soybeans dry enough to plant, Wahl expected to wrap up work that day.

Stover called the crew a "lifesaver" even if they couldn't plant all 800 acres.

"Regardless of how much they get planted, it doesn't take away from what they're doing," Stover said.

Like Stover, Faron Wahl has known farming all his life, though he took a 21-year detour to be a paramedic before joining Farm Rescue. The cause, like farming, is close to his heart.

"We can't do it all and we can't save everything," Wahl said. "We do what we can to fill the need."

### **Out of work**

The help comes just in time for Stover.

His latest scheduled medical procedure — a biopsy of a small mass in his lung — will put him out of commission during the delayed planting season. “There’s a spot in my lung, and they don’t know what it is,” said Stover, who has already undergone one biopsy.

He said he’ll spend three days in the hospital, another five days not being able to drive and two to three weeks not working in the field.

Stover’s leukemia has improved since this winter, and he said he hopes to remain infection-free.

“If this is how things are going to be, I’ll live with it,” he said.

Staving off infection means there’s a chance the third-generation farmer can receive a bone marrow transplant.

None of his siblings can donate marrow to him, but Stover says there are matches on the national list if the time comes.