

VOLUNTEERING

By Dee Goerge



Daryl and Marla De Groot were the first Iowa family to receive planting assistance from Farm Rescue.

BLESSED BY FARM RESCUE

IOWA FAMILY UNABLE TO PLANT 2013 CROP RECEIVES WELCOME HELP FROM NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION.

Daryl and Marla De Groot know what a blessing it is to help others. For about three decades, they have mentored teens who work for them on their dairy farm. Last year, the De Groots gave Farm Rescue volunteers the opportunity to be blessed by helping them. The De Groots' Hull, Iowa, farm was the first Iowa farm the nonprofit organization helped plant crops on since it added Iowa to its service area with a fall harvest project in 2012.

FARMING FROM THE SIDELINES

Daryl was in a full leg cast when Farm Rescue volunteers planted 55 acres of soybeans and 250 acres of corn on May 13, 2013. Marla says while he couldn't do any farm work, Daryl didn't want to miss all the action, so he made a few rounds sitting sidesaddle on a four-wheeler. In addition to Farm Rescue volunteers planting with a 24-row planter, the De Groots' neighbors and family prepped the fields.

This isn't the first time neighbors have come to the De Groots' aid. In 1987, a cow fell on Daryl's right knee and caused a serious injury. Surgery repaired the knee for several years, but in 2006, doctors replaced the knee. Unfortunately, it was crooked, but Daryl thought he could live with it for 10 years.

By 2012, it was apparent he couldn't, and he had a second knee replacement, which developed a serious staph infection. After cleaning the knee out and installing new parts, doctors thought they solved the problem. But a year later, Daryl was plagued with a second bout of staph infection.

Doctors at St. Mary's in Rochester, Minnesota, used a dif-

ferent approach. On March 10, 2013, they took out the knee and put in spacers. Daryl was put in a cast for 10 weeks to get rid of the infection and to prepare the area for a third knee replacement at the end of May.

"It was such a blessing to have Farm Rescue, because there was a very short window for planting corn last spring – about three days," says Daryl. "The neighbors had to plant their own crops, too. They did help for a half day and got all the ground ready."

Marla remembers there were five tractors of friends and neighbors' equipped with their disks and cultivators. "They worked the land right ahead of Farm Rescue on that Monday morning," she says.

Farm Rescue volunteers planted for a day and a night before moving on to their next job in South

LEARN MORE ABOUT FARM RESCUE

It's not a household name yet, but it's getting there. With billboards, press, social media, and a growing number of sponsors and volunteers, people in the Midwest are learning about Farm Rescue.

North Dakota native Bill Gross, a UPS Boeing 747 captain, founded Farm Rescue in 2005 to help farm families dealing with major illness, serious injuries, or a natural disaster. The farmer pays for the inputs to plant or harvest. Farm Rescue provides the volunteers and equipment, due to generous sponsors.

The nonprofit organization helps farmers in North and South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and Iowa. In 2013, Farm Rescue helped 50 farmers, bringing the total number of projects to 252. "We want to let people know that they shouldn't assume others need help more than they do," says Danielle Abbas, Farm Rescue. Applications are available online and are reviewed by board members.

For those who can't physically volunteer but would like to support the organization, Farm Rescue recently started a Sponsor-A-Volunteer program. Donations to the program are used to reimburse volunteers' travel and board expenses while on the road helping farmers.

"As we grow and help more families, our expenses are increasing," says Gross. Any size donation helps Farm Rescue continue its work.

To support, volunteer, or apply for help, call 701/252-2017 or go to farmrescue.org.

Dakota. The De Groots showed their appreciation with lunch for all the volunteers, and other Farm

VOLUNTEERING

Continued



Large equipment helps Farm Rescue finish work quickly so the organization can help more families.

Rescue sponsors provided supper and other meals.

Receiving help from Farm Rescue was both awesome and humbling, the De Groots say. They are more familiar with being on the giving end. “God brings kids to us,” explains Daryl. “We have them work for us, and we pay them for the work they do. Then we send them on.”

Marla would take them in. “They would be part of the family, and we’d have lunch together,” she says. (The De Groots have three children of their own.)

“One boy worked for us for a number of years and just became a deacon in the church. We’ve seen some good things come out of it,” says Daryl. “Hopefully, we are the hands and feet of Jesus,” adds Marla.

A friend at the local radio station, who is a Farm Rescue volunteer, encouraged the De Groots to apply for help. Marla filled out the application online and volunteer Levi Wielenga interviewed them. Marla remembered him from when he was a teen attending a Teens Encounter Christ retreat where she was a volunteer. Wielenga grew up 4 miles from the De Groots and is a railroad engineer who fuels his passion for farming through Farm Rescue.

“It’s an amazing operation. We’ve become close friends with a lot of volunteers. In November, we went to a banquet and they knew us by name,” Marla says.

“I’ve learned that’s what God is calling them to do – to reach out and help – and we have to be willing to take that

help,” says Daryl. “In a situation like ours, I encourage people to apply. Farm Rescue really wants to help.”

“It was a blessing,” says Marla. **S|F**

Get Ready to Make Hay

Farm Rescue volunteers are excited to begin a new service in 2014. They will put up hay. “We have received many requests over the years, but we didn’t have the equipment,” says founder Bill Gross. “Thanks to RDO Equipment Co. sponsoring the equipment, we can now provide haying assistance in all the states we serve.”

Ranchers and livestock farmers are just as vulnerable as crop farmers. They deal with illness, injury, or natural disaster and can suffer major setbacks, especially if the timing is bad. There are narrow windows of time to put up hay to feed livestock.

“We are happy to be able to help them, and it fits in nicely to even out our workload,” says Gross.

Volunteers have been busy planting in the spring and harvesting in the fall. Those who couldn’t help then because of family or work commitments are eager to help during the summer months when hay is put up.

“Some volunteers like to bring their families with them and treat it as a volunteering vacation,” says Gross.

Volunteers will use equipment to make large round bales wrapped with plastic netting. Apply soon, Gross suggests, so that Farm Rescue can begin the process of selecting projects and scheduling them this year.

“Friends and neighbors may also anonymously refer a family that is in need of assistance, since some families are hesitant to ask for assistance themselves,” he adds. **S|F**