



Farm Rescue[®]

Giving a Helping HAND

by Sherry Schaefer

Farmers are typically the last people to ask for help. They are hard-working, proud, and independent; but sometimes, even the strongest people can be brought to their knees.

In the North Dakota, South Dakota, eastern Montana and western Minnesota area, there is a unique organization that appears during tragedy. Farm Rescue is there to assure that crops are planted or harvested, preventing farmers from a loss of income that could literally cost them their farms.



“I’m going to get a big green tractor and drive across North Dakota helping farmers.”



Bill is quick to point out that none of this would be possible without the sponsors and the dedicated volunteers. The families that are helped by Farm Rescue are forever grateful to everyone involved.



Bill did not wait until retirement to pursue his dream of helping the farmer. He put a plan together and went after it.

The story of Farm Rescue begins with Bill Gross who grew up on a farm in North Dakota. He left the farm to become a pilot and now is a Boeing 747 Captain for UPS Airlines flying worldwide. With a lot of windshield time between countries, the pilots often discuss what they’re going to do when they retire. Bill’s heart always went back to his roots and the times he witnessed the struggle of survival among farmers. Bill’s response was, “I’m going to get a big green tractor and drive across North Dakota helping farmers.” Of course most laughed at his answer, but he knew what he wanted to do, even if it was just a crazy dream.

Over supper one night, Bill and a friend discussed his idea and his friend told him “You could do that.” Those were the first words of encouragement he had heard and by the time he got home he decided he WAS going to do that. Bill had traveled to various countries

doing short-term mission work and always wondered what field of mission work he could go into long-term. He came to the ironic realization that his mission field was actually in a field.

Bill did not wait until retirement to pursue his dream of helping the farmer. He put a plan together and went after it. Farm Rescue was officially organized as a non-profit organization in 2005. Their mission was to provide planting and harvesting assistance to farm families that had experienced a major illness, injury, or natural disaster, where the opportunity to continue viable operations still existed.

One of the keys to making this work was to have good equipment and a dependable group of volunteers. RDO Equipment, a family-owned John Deere dealership headquartered in Fargo, ND, was approached by Bill as a potential equipment sponsor.

RDO, who started with one dealership in 1968, has grown to over fifty locations in nine states. Still family owned and operated, they are dedicated to the entrepreneurial spirit of people and they believed in Bill’s dream with Farm Rescue and the retention of the family farm. With that in mind, they became the exclusive equipment sponsor of Farm Rescue from the beginning and continue to do so today.

When launching Farm Rescue, Bill and other volunteers set up at various farm shows to spread the word of their service. Those in need could submit an application for assistance, which would then be reviewed by a board of directors.

Their initial planting season began in 2006 with the first family being Matt and Laura Biel. Matt, a 32-year-old farmer, had been running an auger and while emptying it out, it became top heavy and the hopper started to float up. The natural

reaction is to push it back down but when Matt reached for the hopper, his hand slipped and slid inside. I don’t need to tell you what happened next. It was actually Matt’s sister that told them about Farm Rescue while he was in the hospital. They were leery of a total stranger helping them but once they talked to Bill, they knew their farm was in good hands and a burden was lifted, allowing them to focus on physical recovery.

The Biel family was just the first of many families that would be helped by Farm Rescue. Bill said that the first year was the pivotal year for the success of his mission. He was anxious to fulfill what was promised and make sure Farm Rescue did what it was designed for. He even wondered, “what if we can’t do it?” But when one is driven to succeed like Bill Gross is, failure is not an option. In the first year, Farm Rescue helped eleven farm families. During that first year, only planting

service was offered, with RDO providing new equipment to get the job done quickly so that they could assist as many farmers as possible.



In 2007, RDO provided Farm Rescue with a combine so that they could help with harvest too. The organization began to grow and grab the attention of businesses who supported Bill's cause. By 2008, there were 107 sponsors offering services or donations to help Farm Rescue's operation. Until that time, the organization was operated out of Bill's house, but that year they were able to rent office space in Jamestown, North Dakota.

There are guidelines for assistance for the non-profit organization. Farm Rescue will plant up to 1,000 acres per family and only once in a three-year period. The farmer must provide the fertilizer, seed and fuel. Farm Rescue provides the equipment and manpower to plant or harvest the crop completely free of charge. Farm Rescue does not give money to the farmer in place of services. This is not a bail out, it's a helping hand. Any money that Farm Rescue receives from donations and sponsors is used strictly to keep the organization running and cover expenses. No volunteers receive any monetary compensation.

Volunteers are another important part of Farm Rescue. Many of them hear about the organization and want to help. Some knew Bill's family from years past and some have come to know him through his work with UPS. The volunteers come from all across the US to be part of the one-of-a-kind rescues.

One of the volunteers that I worked with briefly was Bruce Radloff from Interlaken, New York. Bruce is a semi-retired Chief Technology Officer who works with digital mapping for TeleAtlas. He spent a lot of time traveling for work and one morning when he was in Europe, he saw the Today show airing a segment on Farm Rescue. Bruce decided that when he retired, he was going to become a volunteer, even though he had never farmed. So each spring he travels from New York to put in his time driving a tractor and living out a childhood dream while helping someone in need at the same time.

I was able to work with another team of volunteers by the name of Gene Spichke and Warren Zakopyko. Both are retired farmers from North Dakota. When Bill introduced me to them and told them what I did, Warren said, "I get *Heritage Iron*." That in itself was pretty rare to be 900 miles from home and end up in the middle of a field (in the middle of nowhere) with a subscriber. But that was just the start.

The Beautiful Hands of a Farmer is a print that 3-Point Ink is selling with all the proceeds going to Farm Rescue. With all of the framed prints that we've shipped, we've only had one of them get broken. While I'm standing there talking to my newfound subscriber, he tells me that he had recently ordered a "Hands" print and it was delivered broken. So, not only am I standing in a field with a subscriber, but I'm also with the ONLY man who received a damaged print. I should have bought a lottery ticket that day. If I had won, I would have donated it all to Farm Rescue or I wouldn't have been able to live with myself.

One of my jobs was to shuffle a couple of the volunteers to various locations. Clarence Kuss was the last person that I was privileged to work with on my first planting season with Farm Rescue. Clarence also had a farm background and currently works at DuraTech Industries in Jamestown, ND. DuraTech is the manufacturer of the Haybuster equipment line. With my new friend, I'm sure that I can persuade him to help me with a future article on Haybuster for an upcoming issue of *Heritage Iron*. Every volunteer I encountered on this trip was a special person and enthusiastic about helping Farm Rescue.

The case that I was helping on was located in Wilton, ND. I talked with the farmer that they were assisting to see what the circumstances were. Merlin Backman's family had been on that farm for three generations. While Merlin's need wasn't as critical as many of the rescues, he was unable to get the crops in and he was located between two other rescue locations which made it logistically possible.

This winter, Merlin saw someone stuck in a blizzard. The snow was blowing back into the tracks as quickly as they could shovel it out. Merlin decided to get behind the car and push. When he did, he tore the muscles in his arm and ripped the tendons from the bone. At this time, he was unable to lift anything so he reached out to Farm Rescue for assistance in planting 650 acres.

I asked Merlin what he would have done if Farm Rescue hadn't been there. He said that some neighbors had offered to help a little but only after they were done with their own planting. With a very wet spring and such a short window of opportunity for planting, it was doubtful that

the crops would have all been planted, causing financial strain for the next year. The family was grateful that Farm Rescue was there for them to turn to when they were in need.

While I was there, I also visited with a farmer that had been helped in 2008. When we stopped to see him, he was planting pinto beans in a Cat with a Flexi-Coil seeder. So we hopped in the tractor and made a few rounds with him while he told his story.

Wes Doepke, a fourth generation farmer, was cutting winter wheat on July 30 2008. Unbeknownst to him, the combine was on fire behind the cab. The hired man was operating a second combine in the same field. When he noticed Wes's machine on fire, he yelled on the radio for him to get out of the combine NOW. Realizing how bad it was, he tried to turn the combine into the wind so he could escape but the hydraulic lines had burnt through and he couldn't turn. As soon as he stopped, the plastic fuel tank melted creating a pond of fuel all around the combine in a dry wheat field. Wes was forced to jump into the flames and run through them to safety. As soon as he was thrown the flames, he realized that he was also on fire and rolled on the ground trying to put himself out. As soon as the hired man got there, they immediately headed for the hospital, meeting up with the ambulance half way there. Still conscious, he didn't realize the severity of his injuries until the skin started to fall off his arms. Wes said that's when he got to take a 3-week nap.

As with many of the cases handled by Farm Rescue, it's not the actual farm owner that contacts them. Wes was in another world in a drug-induced

coma and didn't have a clue who Farm Rescue was, nor was he in a position to call them. It is often a neighbor or a family member that will contact Farm Rescue to let them know where they can help, then Farm Rescue calls the farm family to offer assistance. Wes knows who Farm Rescue is now and he will never forget them.

The stories of the many families helped by Farm Rescue are too numerous to list in the pages of this magazine. They could fill a book. Each year Farm Rescue puts together a DVD to tell the story of their work for the previous year. The DVDs, available on their website, are free and used to spread the word about Farm Rescue.

While every sponsor, large or small, is important to Farm Rescue, it is a full-time job to recruit the major sponsorships that are needed. Bill has a dream of making the organization self-supporting by owning a section of land in every state where they operate. This section would be farmed with Farm Rescue equipment using volunteers

and the proceeds from the crop would help fund the organization so that they could help more farm families in need.

It's a wonderful concept of farming to help other farmers through Farm Rescue. However, since this is a non-profit organization, Farm Rescue doesn't have the funding to acquire land. Currently, a Farm Rescue foundation is being formed with a target of achieving this goal. Bill hopes that large corporations will recognize the importance of this program and help out with donations or grants. Other avenues might include farmers



Merlin Backman's son gives a hand to Farm Rescue, who is giving a hand to his family.



Merlin Backman and his family thank Farm Rescue for this assistance with spring planting


Farm Rescue

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NY Volunteer Bruce Radloff

who wish to leave a legacy. Instead of having their land sold off as part of an estate, it could be left to the foundation that would use it to help other farmers in a time of crisis.

In 2008, Bill Gross was selected as a CNN Hero. He receives no compensation for his time. His heart is with the family farm and his goal is to help keep the family farm an entity in America. Every fall, Farm Rescue holds a fundraiser banquet. Many of the video clips from these banquets can be found on YouTube. It is one testimonial after another praising this wonderful organization that has relieved so many families of a burden and literally helped save their farms. None of you would even dream of not planting a crop for a year. It would lead to financial ruin and the disposal of the farm for that family.

None of the cases served by Farm Rescue expected

to be hit with a crisis. Life can drastically change in the blink of an eye. If you're in an area currently served by Farm Rescue, there is a streamlined organization to call when rural assistance is needed. It's not government funded so nothing comes out of your tax money. It is fully supported by sponsors who also depend on the farmers for their livelihood and various donations.

This harvest, Farm Rescue will help its 150th family. That is 150 family farms that were facing a possible non-existence in the future. Imagine how that number could grow if Farm Rescue could branch out into more areas. Bill Gross had a dream and he's making that dream come true by selflessly giving his time and talent to assure that the family farm is still there for the next generation.....and the next..... and the next. **HI**

If you want to know more about Farm Rescue, its mission, or how you can help, visit their website at:

www.farmrescue.org

or give them a call at:

701-252-2017



Farm Rescue

Our Hands COLLECTION™

Available exclusively from 3-Point Ink
(Oliver Heritage & Heritage Iron)

“The Beautiful Hands of a Farmer”

Long before the sun rises, the farmer's strong hands start the day clasped together to pray.

Asking God's blessings on the day and the strength to deal with whatever comes his way.

With folded hands he prays for family, friends, and his fields. He knows his crops need a good yield.

From sun up to sun down his hands have cared for his family, plowed the fields, and tilled the ground.

After he has fed the flocks, and harvested the grain, he looks to Heaven and thanks the Lord for the evening rain.

As his family gathers round the table for the evening meal, his strong hands hold the hands beside him. He gives thanks to the Heavenly Father for the fruit of his labor, and asks for wisdom to guide him.

Each wrinkle on his hands shows the love, devotion, hard work and pain;

But through God's love, his perseverance will sustain.

God has said the rain, the snow, the sunshine, and the night all have purpose and a season.

The farmer's hands know the reason.

The farmer's hands are done for the day, one last time they are clasped to pray.

Thanking God for the beautiful day the Master has sent his way. ©

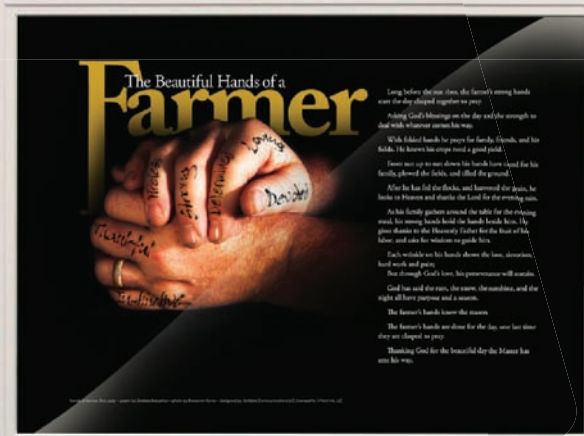
100% of the profits from *The Beautiful Hands of the Farmer* will be donated to:

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19x23



18x22



Every hand tells a story. The farmer's hands tells a story of hard work and dedication through calloused fingers, scars and soiled nails. It's a story that only the farm family can understand. The Beautiful Hands of the Farmer was created to tell that story.

Each picture is printed using fade resistant UV inks on acid-free archival paper and includes an American-made frame. Our rustic-style frame is built from actual barn-siding with a second option of a solid walnut frame.

Proudly display the Farmer's Hands print and help another farm family at the same time. This is one of those pictures that will be passed down to the next generation.



Walnut: \$109 Barn Siding: \$89 Unframed: \$55

Please the box and indicate the number of prints you wish to order.

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Frames will be shipped UPS. We can not deliver to a post office box.

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