

Farm Rescue again helping plant seeds of hope

By DALE HILDEBRANT, Farm & Ranch Guide
Friday, May 21, 2010

LUVERNE, N.D. - These past six months have been a difficult time for Bruce Emery, who farms near Luverne, but with the help of Farm Rescue this spring, things are looking a little better.

Last November Emery's wife, Tamara, died in an ATV accident, and then in February Emery slipped on an icy patch in his driveway and tore a knee-cap tendon, an accident that would prevent him from doing any work during this spring's planting season.



Bruce Emery (I) and his son Jarret.

Like just about every other farmer that Farm Rescue has been involved with, Emery knew of the program, but never thought he would need its services. It ended up that one of his neighbors, Tony Heinze, made the initial contact with the Farm Rescue office.

Bill Gross, founder of Farm Rescue, then called Emery and encouraged him to fill out an application for assistance and within two weeks' time Emery was informed he had been selected as one of the farmers who would receive assistance this spring with crews planting 600 acres of crop.

According to Gross, the planting unit was at Emery's farm during one of their first operations, earlier this spring, to plant the small grain crop. Now, on May 12, they had returned to his Luverne farm to plant 300 acres of soybeans.

This particular day four employees from RDO Equipment's stores at Casselton and Fargo were at the farm, having decided to donate a day of their time to help plant soybeans. Since the beginning of Farm Rescue, RDO has supplied the farm equipment to make the program possible.

Brian Verkuehlen, the regional sales manager for RDO in Casselton, was driving the John Deere 4-wheel drive tractor and no-till air seeder across the field and telling why the Farm Rescue program is so important to RDO.

“We're in the business of helping farmers, and by working with Farm Rescue it gives us a chance to help farmers who have had trouble get back on their feet,” Verkuehlen said. “And rather than us working with the farmers directly, a program like this allows us to help those farmers that need assistance.”

Though still sidelined by his injury, Emery's condition continues to improve. At first he was confined to the bed and then graduated to a walker and then to crutches. He's now down to using just one crutch to get around and has started a physical therapy program. It will still be several weeks yet before Emery will be able to do much work.

“It is hard to ask for help, and it's hard sitting here in the pickup and watching others do your work. You are giving up control of your farm to somebody, and yet Bill reassured me that his volunteer staff knew what they were doing and they would be here until the project was completed,” Emery said. “And it's been working out real well.

“Earlier, he (Gross) told me they wouldn't move on until they had finished seeding the wheat crop, and the other day he assured me they would be here until the soybeans were finished,” he continued. “Now they have been here just about a week working on the soybeans, since the weather conditions have held him up, but he should be able to finish up here today and move on.”

Once the soybeans are planted, Emery still has to figure out how to get some corn acres planted to silage corn, which he feeds during the winter to his 200-head beef herd.

For the cattle side of the operation, Emery has had to depend mainly on help from his 17-year old son Jarret, who is a junior this year at Valley City High School. Jarret has spent the last few months balancing school, homework and filling in for his dad around the farm.

Since the elder Emery's accident, Jarret has been getting up around 5:30 each morning and tending to the cattle herd, which has been especially challenging at this time of the year due to calving season. But the challenge of spring planting has been pretty much relieved by the Farm Rescue crew.

“This is our 110th farmer we have helped since we started back in 2005,” Gross said, “and we hope to help about 30 farmers this year, with 20 of those getting help with spring planting.”

Farm Rescue volunteers started April 15 near Redfield, S.D., planting wheat for a farm family and gradually worked their way north to Niagara, N.D., before heading back south again.

“It has been another frustrating spring this year. It's been stop and start and stop and start and we don't get much done,” Gross said. “But now that the weather is supposed to be better we will be running this unit 24 hours a day in three 8-hour shifts.”

Again this year, Farm Rescue is helping farmers who have been beset with a wide variety of misfortunes, ranging from cancer cases, to broken ribs from an attack by a bull, to a broken neck sustained in a pickup rollover.

The organization has two planting units running this spring, with one in the eastern part of the state and the other out west.

“We are planning on wrapping up our seeding operations by June 1,” Gross said, “and we still

could take an additional one or two cases on this spring if there are some real serious cases of need. In addition, we are starting to take applications for harvesting assistance now.”

The concept for Farm Rescue took shape in Gross' mind back in 2005 as he was flying planes for UPS. Gross, who grew up on a farm near Cleveland, N.D., wanted to do something to help farmers who were beset with problems.

“My plan was that once I retired I would, on an individual basis, go out with a tractor and a piece of equipment and travel the state giving a hand to those farmers - a lone ‘good Samaritan’,” he recalled. “But a friend of mine, after hearing my plan, said I was thinking way too small and needed to form an organization to handle this task and not wait until I retired to put those plans in motion.”

The success and growth of the program came much faster than he imagined.

“I knew the program would be successful, but I never thought we would be able to help this many families in five years,” he said. “It seems like it was just yesterday that we started the program and we've already helped 110 families. You start getting up into some significant numbers as the years go by. I think we are in the right place at the right time to help farmers in our region. I think we are on the right track.”

Gross gives credit for a unique partnership between the volunteers, those sponsoring companies and individuals, and the farm families needing assistance for the success of Farm Rescue.

He still has plans to spread the Farm Rescue concept to other parts of the nation, but the recent economic slow-down has forced him to put those dreams on the shelf, at least for now.

Since RDO Equipment had volunteers on site that day, it gave Gross the opportunity to comment on the importance of that firm's support to the entire project.

“I am very thankful and impressed with all of our sponsors, but especially with RDO Equipment for providing all of the equipment and coming out and volunteering,” he noted. “Whatever we need at Farm Rescue they provide - no questions asked. They are 100 percent behind this program, as are all of our other sponsors.

“What I am most proud of is that Farm Rescue has created an avenue for people and businesses to help farmers in our region,” he continued.

Gross used the example of one of the volunteers who wanted to help a farm family - in this case the Emery farm.

“(The volunteer) isn't just going to show up at Bruce's place. He doesn't know Bruce is injured, he doesn't know where Bruce lives,” Gross said. “How could he help if there wasn't Farm Rescue? And the same goes for businesses. They may want to help farmers as a way of giving back to the community, but how do they help farmers? Providing this avenue helps our entire region.”

For Bruce Emery, he's glad he was able to tap into that avenue.

“It was a big relief that they came in; they were all qualified people and did a good job,” Emery said. “Hats off to Bill and his crew. I never realized there were that many people that needed assistance.”