

To the rescue

Assisting farmers in need

By Anne Denholm, editor

Delbert and Arlene Olson of Wing, N.D. were always self-sufficient farmers; but when Delbert was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2007 and faced additional cancer treatment again in 2009, some things had to change.

The Olsons weren't able to bring in the crops needed to sustain their family farm. Delbert's health prevented him physically to do the work.

That's when Farm Rescue stepped in to help harvest about 850 acres of wheat. "When we made the phone call to Farm Rescue, it was a really difficult

thing to do," explained Arlene Olson. "It's hard for farmers to ask for help but I'm really glad we did. I just can't express how much we appreciate what Farm Rescue did for us at that time."

Olson works for North Dakota Farmers Union as an outreach staff member and was familiar with the Farm Rescue organization. She initiated the application process to help them get through the difficult season. "We were married for over 45 years. Delbert was born and raised on the farm and this was the only home we've known," she added.

Farm Rescue plants and harvests crops for family farmers who are dealing with an unexpected crisis due to a major injury, illness or natural disaster.

According to Pam Musland, Farm Rescue director of operations, "Farm Rescue does not give money to farmers. We just do the field work to help farmers get through a critical time. Up to 1,000 acres are planted or harvested for each family. The



assisted family is responsible for providing crop inputs, such as seed, fertilizer and fuel."

Farm Rescue is funded through sponsorships, grants and individual donations. RDO Equipment Company provides all the John Deere planting and harvesting equipment to Farm Rescue, free of charge. Donations are used to pay for the many costs associated with planting and harvesting a crop, transporting equipment, and housing and feeding volunteers. Assisting family farmers in crisis wouldn't be possible without the support of North Dakota Farmers Union, Farmers Union Insurance, Farmers Union oil companies, and CHS elevators across the state.

Since 2006 when field operations began, Farm Rescue has assisted 131 farm families in North Dakota, South

Dakota, western Minnesota and eastern Montana. In 2010, Farm Rescue planted for 20 families and harvested for 10.

"Delbert and I farmed together all those years. The Farm Rescue volunteers were perfect strangers when they first arrived and after a few days, they were just like family. We joked and laughed together. We showed them the fields and they took over. They knew what to do," Olson said.

On April 16, 2010, Delbert passed away after his extended battle with cancer. His last harvest was made possible thanks to Farm Rescue. "I can't help but say thank you," Olson stated, "I encourage anyone out there who needs extra support to make the call and fill out the paperwork. It's simple and you should take the time to do it. I'm glad Farm Rescue was there for us."

Lund testifies at workshop

Sioux County President Allen Lund recently participated in a joint workshop on Wednesday, Dec. 8 hosted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ).

The workshop focused on discrepancies between the prices farmers receive and the prices consumers pay. Workshop participants gave explanations for the price differences and suggested possible solutions for narrowing the gap.

Lund is an independent cattle producer from Selfridge, N.D., and spoke on a panel entitled "Margins in the Livestock and Poultry Industries," which discussed the division of the retail dollar and looked at trends in the beef, pork, and poultry industries. The panel also gave possible explanations for changes and the margins in which the market participants operate in general.

The workshop began with opening remarks from U.S. Secretary of

Agriculture Tom Vilsack, Attorney General with the U.S. Department of Justice Eric Holder and Assistant Attorney General with the Anti Trust division of the DOJ Christine Varney.

Four panels were held throughout the day along with public testimony from the audience.

Lund explained, "My panel consisted of a moderator, three economists, a cattle producer, a pork producer, and a poultry grower. Basically what I commented on as a cattle producer was information pertaining to the prices I have been receiving for livestock on my own operation, as well as stressing the need for modified rules to the Packers and Stockyard Act which would go a long way toward putting producers on a level playing field in the marketplace."

Three main points were made at the workshop:

- U.S. livestock producers are not receiving enough money for their product. Due to this, the average age of farmers and ranchers in the

About Farm Rescue:

- Farm Rescue was founded by Bill Gross, a native North Dakotan and pilot for UPS Airlines.
- Farm Rescue is operated by a volunteer labor force that comes from all over the state and country to help. Many volunteers are retired farmers.
- Assisted farmers are chosen through an application process that is many times initiated by a relative, neighbor or sponsor of Farm Rescue.
- Applications are now being accepted for the 2011 planting season. For more information, call (701) 252-2017, email: info@farmrescue.org or go online to: www.farmrescue.org

U.S. is rising at a steady rate and less young farmers are stepping in to take their places.

- Consolidation and vertical integration is creating excessive buying power in the packing and retail sector. This is allowing corporate giants to drive down prices being paid to producers while

at the same time driving up their own profits.

- Rules to the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921 need to be modified to address these issues. GIPSA and the Department of Justice need to be provided with the right tools to enforce these rules.