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Farm Rescue aids Regent farmer

By Lewellyn Rustan

Farm Rescue arrived on the scene south of New England early this week. Sporting huge signs, and large flags flying in the breeze above the combine, they attract a lot of attention.

Farm Rescue, a nonprofit organization that provides planting and harvesting assistance to farm families who have experienced a major injury, illness or natural disaster, was founded by North Dakota native Bill Gross in 2005.

About two years later, Regent



Photo by Lewellyn Rustan

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Farm Rescue volunteers Shaun Sipma and Jack Rutledge.

Farm Rescue

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area farmer Marvin Jorstad and his doctor began monitoring his PSA levels. Over the next five years, those numbers slowly but steadily grew higher and higher. Biopsies tested negative. Until late this spring, after the crops were planted, when another biopsy tested positive for prostate cancer.

By the time this story is published, Marvin will have had surgery to remove his prostate along with any adjoining tissue that is found to test positive during the surgery. Marvin and his wife Bernadine left for the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. on Tuesday morning.

Other than the PSA numbers, Marvin had no symptoms to concern him. "I feel good," he said. "No different than before. I really don't know that I've got anything wrong with me." He shares his doctor's optimism for successfully eliminating the cancer.

But leaving right at the beginning of harvesting one of his best crops ever, was more than frustrating. His daughter, Gina, suggested contacting Farm Rescue. "I didn't think that we would qualify for anything like that," Marvin said. But Gina got an application. They filled it out and submitted it. "I'd seen them working, and read about them in farm magazines," Marvin remembered. Now he's seen them working in his own fields for a couple days before he left. When he returns, his harvest will be completed.

Volunteers from North Dakota and as far away as Georgia, have been running the equipment. Jack Rutledge from Georgia, has had a number of career hats, working in medical and education fields, mostly in larger cities. But he always loved open country and farm life. As a youngster, he spent a summer on a farm. "I didn't want to go back home," he said. Now retired, he's enjoying what he does as a Farm Rescue volunteer. "I get a lot of satisfaction helping people." That's a common feeling among those volunteers. Another volunteer came from Minot where he works as a television newsman. But Shaun Sipma grew up about a dozen miles from where he's running a combine this week. A Bowman High School graduate, Shaun feels at home in the field. But most of his volunteer service is provided using his professional experience covering and publicizing the work of Farm Rescue. "I'm usually behind the scenes," he explained. "Very rarely do I get the chance to spend an honest day's labor in the field."

The volunteers help wherever they can. Some of them have farm backgrounds, some do not. One of them commented, "Can you believe they actually let me operate this \$300,000 combine? Shaun left at home a major disaster project of his own, to come to New England to help the Jorstads. Shaun's home was one of those in the Minot flood more than a year ago. With six feet of water on the first floor, and a basement full of foul waste, there certainly was enough work for him there. He hopes to have repairs complete so that he can move back into his house by the end of the year. So why is he here? "It's the right thing to do," he said simply. "There's an obligation. Give a helping hand when they need it the most, to help them get over the hump. Stop thinking about it, just do it."

Dickinson area farmer Matt Biel was the first farmer helped by Farm Rescue. He returned the favor on Sunday, helping the crew set up the combine provided by RDO to harvest 1,000 acres of Jorstad's wheat. "Farmers are used to being independent," Rutledge commented. "They want to do it themselves. But Farm Rescue is there if they need help."

Farm Rescue is there because of generous sponsors and donations, in addition to the all volunteer workers. To learn about the corporate sponsors, go to farmrescue.org. The list is impressive. It includes a number of southwestern North Dakota businesses. Also impressive in the spirit of wanting to help, is the list of friends and neighbors of the Jorstads, that stepped up to make this time easier for them.

Meals were provided, not only for the Farm Rescue crew, but also for Jorstad's own crew of workers, by The Herald, Barb Farber, Tara Bieber, The New England Lions Club, Donna Rustan-Stang, Leah Rustan, Lavonne Stang, Susan Peterson, Lavon Reindel, Arlys Schmidt, and Jodi Olsonawski.

Marvin's brother Ray, here on vacation, extended his stay another couple weeks, or longer if needed. Rounding out Marvin's crew, are Russell Wolf, Gary Stang, and Bob Yarchan. "Farm Rescue is a blessing," Wolf said. "This is a crisis. It's fortunate that they're here, to give Marvin some peace of mind. This took a big load off his shoulders. It's a good crop, and I'm sure he felt, 'Now what'? Farm Rescue really did come to the rescue."



Photo by Lewellyn Rustan

Farm Rescue's new semi-trailer, hauled it's first load of wheat from Jorstad's field to the elevator in Scranton. The wheat weighed 62 pounds per bushel, and tested 16.1% protein. The yield was also very good.