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Farm Rescue to expand into South Dakota this spring

By DALE HILDEBRANT, Farm & Ranch Guide

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JAMESTOWN, N.D. - The spring planting season will soon be here and to meet the challenge of farm families needing assistance in getting their crops planted, Farm Rescue is gearing up for the season as well. However, this year the Jamestown, N.D.-based non-profit organization will be expanding their territory to include much of South Dakota.



Pam Musland, operations director,
Farm Rescue

“Within the past few months we have received a grant from the Wal-Mart stores in South Dakota in the amount of \$50,000 and the intent is that this will allow us to expand our operations south of I-90,” said Pam Musland, Farm Rescue director of operations. “In addition, one of our goals is to reach more farmers in western Minnesota, but if that is to happen we will need some additional sponsors from that area as well, since we aren't going to use dollars from North Dakota to go into Minnesota.”

The Wal-Mart organizations in both North and South Dakota are now \$50,000 sponsors, and Musland noted that the grant from the North Dakota stores makes up one-fifth of the total Farm Rescue budget in North Dakota.

“Wal-Mart has been fantastic to work with,” he said. “We've had some volunteers from Wal-Mart actually out there helping in the fields. It really shows Wal-Mart's commitment to the rural communities and their customers in this neck of the woods. It's a huge donation.”

Farm Rescue founder and president, Bill Gross, also announced the organization has joined forces with CardPartner, Inc., to launch the Farm Rescue Visa affinity credit card.

“The card is a convenient way for people to support the mission of our organization,” Gross said. “As a nonprofit, it is a constant challenge to generate operational income. We view this venture as an opportunity to create a valuable income stream for Farm Rescue, and provide multiple benefits to cardholders.”

Farm Rescue will receive \$50 from CardPartner for every card that is activated. Then once a month, for the life of the program, the organization will receive a check from CardPartner for a portion of every dollar charged by cardholders. Supporters can choose one of five unique images for the card's front.

CardPartner is an online company that specializes in helping smaller U.S.-based membership organizations and charities create affinity credit card programs. Visa cards offered through

CardPartner are issued by UMB Bank, n.a., headquartered in Kansas City, Mo.

Applications for assistance now being accepted

Farm Rescue is currently accepting applications for crop planting assistance from farm families in North and South Dakota, western Minnesota and the eastern edge of Montana who have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster.

“Last year, Farm Rescue assisted 36 farm families in the region, 28 received planting assistance and eight were helped with their harvest,” Musland said. “Our purpose is to help them during this rough period in their life, so they can continue to farm. Our work wouldn't be possible without a terrific volunteer labor force, and the many individuals and businesses that support Farm Rescue.

“We plan to assist at least the same number of families in 2009 so it's essential that farmers apply early in order to receive top consideration.”

Each family can receive up to 1,000 acres planted free of charge, but the farmer is responsible for having the seed and dry fertilizer on hand and the fuel costs are decided on a case-by-case basis. Usually small grains and soybeans are planted, but there have been isolated cases where a planter was leased for corn planting.

“Farmers should list all the crops they normally plant and that's something we can work out,” Musland said.

Families assisted are selected based on a number of factors, she indicated, including the extent of need, farm size, farm viability and geographic location. Applications postmarked by March 31 will receive priority consideration.

Sponsorship remains strong

With the current tough economic times, Musland thought the sponsorship support level for Farm Rescue might have dropped off this year, but so far that hasn't happened.

“We have had a few that dropped off,” she said, “but, overall, we have maintained our sponsorship level and actually gained a few. In fact, some of the sponsors we have had in the past have actually increased their giving this past year, so it has been fantastic in that regard.”

Personal donations are an area that is growing, Musland noted, with many giving memorials to Farm Rescue.

“Our last donation in 2008 came on New Year's Eve and it was from the Bronx in New York,” she said. “People from all over the country are making \$25, \$50 and \$100 donations, which is great. The memorials and individual gifts are all acknowledged on our website.”

Several other sponsors have also come on board during the past few weeks, according to Musland, which brings the number of sponsors to over 100.

Some of the more recent sponsors include: Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra, Cornerstone Bank, Dynamic Properties, First International Bank & Trust, First Premier Bank, First United Methodist Church of Bismarck, ProAg, Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers, Ryan Chevrolet, Scheels, and Walock-Johnson Insurance, Inc.

To acquire an application for assistance, apply for a Farm Rescue Visa card or make a personal donation, go to <http://www.farmrescue.org/> or call 701-252-2017.