



Farm Rescue in Beulah

By Kate Johnson, *Beulah Beacon*

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Farm Rescue has recently been brought out to Bob and Belinda Fitterer's farm just outside Beulah. After Bob suffered an injury and had to undergo a shoulder replacement, he and his farm were anonymously nominated to be "farm rescued."

Farm Rescue is a non-profit, volunteer-driven organization with the mission of assisting farm families who've suffered a catastrophic loss due to illness, injury, or natural disaster. Sponsors, individual donors, and volunteers come together to assist these families directly with on-farm assistance. Money is not offered to the farm owners; Farm Rescue strictly brings volunteers and equipment to assist in the planting, haying, or harvesting of their land. The Fitterer farm was approximately 150 acres of barley, oats and wheat needing to be swathed and baled for his cattle.

Steve McKitrick is the volunteer coordinator for Farm Rescue and is from Colorado Springs. Farm Rescue is an organization and mission that resonates with him. As a young boy his family lost their farm because his father suffered a heart attack and had to quit the farm. Being retired from the United States Army and growing up on a farm, McKitrick believed that, being involved with agriculture and needing to work from home, Farm Rescue was a "perfect fit" for him. As volunteer coordinator, McKitrick's job is to find volunteers to assist the farmers.

A lot of the volunteers have other jobs, and Farm Rescue works around their schedules to find a time when they are available. Bankers, lawyers, airline pilots – working full-time jobs – all have dedicated their free time to volunteer for the organization.

“They will dedicate their vacation to come and work with Farm Rescue by driving equipment, trucks, etc., and helping out on the farm.” says McKitrick, “Some are retired and just want to pay it forward for all the help they have received in their lives.”

When farms are in need of being rescued, they first need to apply for rescue assistance. The application goes through a process in which the Farm Rescue board of directors decides if the case is one they are to participate in.

“We work very hard to ensure that there is a legitimate need,” says McKitrick. The documents provided during the application process are approved or denied based specific circumstances that the family has.

“When the family is ready, we align volunteers with skills and the equipment necessary to complete the job,” says McKitrick.

The assistance is free to the farm family, all made possible by Farm Rescue's sponsors and individual donors.

As of right now, Farm Rescue covers eastern Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota. The organization and volunteers move around based on crop readiness. Cody Hetzler, Hazen, Troy Sailer, Golden Valley, and Rodney Eckroth, Bismarck – all Farm Rescue Volunteers – have been swathing, raking, and baling for the Fitterer family.

McKitrick is enjoying his time out from behind his desk, as well as North Dakota.

“I absolutely love the people of our entire service area,” said McKitrick. “North Dakotans are very friendly, proud, patriotic, and hard working people. I love getting away from my big city and just being out here in the fresh air, hard work, and just see the sense of pride and community the people of NoDak have.”