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Farm Rescue Honors Longtime Volunteers with Annual Service Award

*Nonprofit names Emil Baranko (Waukegan, IL) and Michael Wilson (Bettendorf, IA)
as "Good Samaritans" for 2023*

HORACE, N.D., January 31, 2024 - Farm Rescue, a nonprofit organization that provides free planting, haying, harvesting, commodity hauling and livestock feeding assistance to farm families who have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster, has honored Emil Baranko and Michael Wilson with its annual Good Samaritan Award.

The Good Samaritan Award was created in 2016 to honor individuals who support Farm Rescue with the compassionate heart of the Good Samaritan. That support may include an overwhelming contribution to further the mission of the organization, serving as an ambassador for the nonprofit, or going above and beyond as an Angel in Blue volunteer to help farm families in crisis. Beginning in 2019, Farm Rescue began recognizing two honorees with this annual award.

Baranko and Wilson's combined service to Farm Rescue spans nearly 2 decades. Through their dedication, hard work and leadership, these volunteers have helped grow the organization's impact in rural communities, as well as its base of supporters. They have touched the lives of many farm families throughout Farm Rescue's 18-year history and inspired other volunteers to follow in their footsteps.

Emil Baranko grew up on a farm near Chesterton, IN. His father, a Hungarian immigrant, was a steelworker who purchased a farm as a means of supplementing his income and feeding his family. Despite having two brothers and three sisters, Baranko says he is the one child who truly loved farming. After graduating high school, he attended Loyola University where he earned a degree in Biology. During his college years, Baranko became well acquainted with the city of Chicago working as a cab driver. Once he completed his education, Baranko served in the Peace Corp for nearly three years. Much of his time was spent in the state of Orissa, India where he taught agricultural mechanics. Along with working on tractors and other farm equipment, he assisted with land reclamation projects and utilizing equipment efficiently. After receiving his draft notice, Baranko spent two years in the United States Army. Although trained as a medical records specialist, he worked as a personnel clerk at Headquarters, Medical Command Europe, Heidelberg, Germany for seventeen months. A year later, he married his girlfriend Donna, whom he met during college. The couple has two sons and two grandchildren and will be celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. Once he returned stateside, Baranko also began his career in construction. He managed the drywall division of a decorating company for four years then worked as a carpenter for another three years until he was hired by one of his customers to serve as a superintendent of home building in Chicago's western suburbs. Baranko would later become the Vice President of Construction for the same company, Richard Smykal, Inc. Throughout his career he has developed 15 subdivisions and overseen the construction of over 3,500 homes. Baranko says he loved the work, and it allowed him to gain experience with heavy equipment and trucks. He has maintained a commercial driver's license since 1978. In retirement, Baranko and his wife now volunteer at a local food pantry several days each week. His post-career years also led him to one of his greatest passions - Farm Rescue. Baranko says he first heard about the organization in a farming publication and decided to call the main office. The following year, he was serving on his first volunteer crew planting wheat for a farm family in south central North Dakota. This was also his first interaction with fellow volunteer and previous Good Samaritan Award Winner Kenneth Chyle. The pair formed an immediate bond and have worked together on dozens of assistance cases throughout their service career. Baranko is now entering his 10th year of service with Farm Rescue.

"I didn't expect to be recognized with this award, but I'm thrilled to receive it," said Baranko. "I've worked pretty hard, and I think about all the other people I've served with who also deserve this title. I'm just honored that Kenneth and I have now both been recognized. He has been an incredible friend and mentor to me throughout the years. I'm so glad we have the opportunity to do what we do, and I want to thank Bill Gross for that opportunity. I don't think he realizes what it means to us volunteers."

Michael Wilson was born in the Sauk Prairie region of Wisconsin but spent much of his childhood and teenage years living in Janesville, WI. Although he considered himself a city kid, he remembers many summers working on his uncle's dairy farm and says that is where he caught the farming bug. Wilson's uncle also ran John Deere machinery, which played a big role in shaping his future career. After completing his degree in ag mechanization at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, he moved to Dubuque, Iowa, for his first job with John Deere. Throughout his 37-year career, Wilson held several positions within the company in various locations. His states of residence included Iowa and Wisconsin on multiple occasions, as well as Minnesota, Ohio, and Kansas. He also spent time working overseas within John Deere's Asia territory. Eventually, he returned to the Quad Cities area of Iowa and Illinois to finish his career. Wilson retired in Bettendorf, IA, where he still resides today. He met his wife, Debbie, on a blind date arranged by a mutual friend. The couple recently celebrated their 40th anniversary and have grown a family that includes three children and six grandchildren. Wilson says his wife was a tremendous source of encouragement and support throughout his career, with a total of ten location changes for their family. It was a conversation with longtime friend, fellow John Deere retiree and previous Good Samaritan Award winner, Mark Baumgarten, that introduced Wilson to Farm Rescue. Baumgarten grew up on a family farm in North Dakota, where the organization has its roots. He began volunteering with the nonprofit shortly after retirement and thought Wilson would enjoy serving the same mission. During his first volunteer trip, Wilson spent a week in the spring working alongside Baumgarten and two other John Deere retirees, Ken Enstrom and Jerry Burau. He says it was a great experience for their entire crew and he has been serving ever since. Wilson also credits Baumgarten as one of Farm Rescue's 'Pied Pipers', with more than a dozen volunteers joining the cause thanks to his encouragement. Throughout his service career with the organization, Wilson has been a valued contributor on planting crews, utilizing both air seeders and row crop planters, on harvest crews and with bale moving teams. He often volunteers for two weeks in the spring and at least one week in the fall, as well as assisting the organization's full-time staff in building training materials and operational protocols. Wilson is now entering his 8th year of service with Farm Rescue.

"I feel quite honored to be considered for this, especially with how many volunteers there are," said Wilson. "The level of commitment that so many Farm Rescue supporters possess is truly incredible. To be recognized as part of this key group is amazing. I enjoy working with each farm family, as well as my Farm Rescue teammates. It's an opportunity to accomplish an important goal for someone who really needs it."

"Emil Baranko and Michael Wilson exemplify the 'Good Samaritans' that make our mission a success," said Bill Gross, Founder and President of Farm Rescue. "May God bless them for their selfless acts of helping others in a time of crisis."

Previous recipients of the Good Samaritan Award, include Agnes Liudahl of West Fargo, ND, Reuben Liechty of Jamestown, ND, the Engelstad Family of Las Vegas, NV, Gene Spichke and Warren Zakopyko of Kief, ND, Erwin "Smokey" Wright of Minot, ND, Bill Krumwiede of Voltaire, ND, Charlie Bartsch of Velva, ND, Garry Deckert of Bismarck, ND, Kenneth Chyle of Auburn, KY and Mark Baumgarten of Bettendorf, IA.



Photo: Farm Rescue volunteer, Emil Baranko of Waukegan, IL
*CLICK TO DOWNLOAD HIGHER RESOLUTION IMAGE.



Photo: Farm Rescue volunteer, Michael Wilson of Bettendorf, IA
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Photo: 2023 Farm Rescue Good Samaritan Awards
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About Farm Rescue

Farm Rescue was founded in 2005 and has helped more than 1,000 families since its inception. The organization's mission is to help farmers and ranchers who have experienced a major illness, injury, or natural disaster by providing the necessary equipment and volunteer labor to perform time-sensitive services. Applications for assistance are currently being accepted and can be obtained at www.farmrescue.org or by calling 701-252-2017.

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