

Verendrye Network News

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Farm Rescue helps Burlington area brothers

Farm Rescue depends on volunteers putting in lots of time



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Brothers Jerome, left, and Ron Behm received help from Farm Rescue this spring after they both had medical problems.

Farm Rescue helps Burlington area brothers

by Tom Rafferty

There is no forgiveness when it comes to planting a crop. It has to be planted at the right time and it has to be done right.

That is one of the things Ron Behm knows after having farmed with his brother, Jerome, for decades on a farm near Burlington in Verendrye Electric Cooperative territory.

Like many North Dakota farmers, these brothers are tough, determined and hardworking. But sometimes even the toughest farmers need a helping hand to get the crop planted in time.

The brothers realized they needed help this year after they each suffered

separate health problems — Ron from an accident with a bull and Jerome from problems related to anemia.

Their health problems did not keep them from farming, but they knew they could not plant this year's crop without some outside help. That's when they decided to call Farm Rescue.

"A lot of wheat that was seeded wouldn't have been seeded if it wasn't for Farm Rescue," Ron said.

Ron was injured Nov. 15 when a bull unexpectedly charged him while he was on horseback. The incident was captured on film and the bull could be seen charging him with three powerful thrusts. The bull's horn gored his leg, breaking bones and tearing skin and

flesh with each thrust.

"I thought I was going to be dead. I thought I wouldn't be able to see my grandchildren grow up," Ron said.

Having Ron out of the operation for a while was tough, but with the help of family and friends, they were able to continue their farm work through the winter while Ron recovered. Then Jerome began having health problems in the spring. He underwent surgery for various complications, including internal bleeding, due to anemia he has been fighting for several years.

In March, Jerome had two surgeries. His chest was opened and he has the scars to prove it.

"I'll tell you what, when they open those ribs, boy does that hurt afterwards," Jerome said.

The Behms were able to have their family and neighbors help, but Ron said it was tough because other farmers also had their own work to do and family and friends had to work around their job schedules.

Ron is very relieved and grateful he called Farm Rescue, but at first he was unsure if he should call.

"I was really reluctant about calling because I had never solicited for help like this in my life," Ron said.

Both of them helped work alongside the Farm Rescue volunteers in late May and June, but they were limited in the amount of work they could do. Ron walks with a noticeable limp and his leg swells when he does too much. Jerome gets tired more easily and has to rest more



The Farm Rescue tractor and seeder are a welcome sight to farmers who need help. Farm Rescue volunteer Gene Spichke, left, helps Jerome Behm in a field near Burlington in June.

than he used to.

The time commitment it takes for farming is one of the reasons why Farm Rescue founder Bill Gross decided to start the organization. Farm Rescue does not give anyone money, but Gross said time is more valuable than money when it comes to farming.

Farm Rescue depends on volunteers putting in lots of time.

"They put in long hours and without volunteers, this would not happen," Gross said.

Gross is also familiar with farmers who are reluctant to ask for help. Those who need help are encouraged to contact Farm Rescue and fill out an application. Gross said in many cases they are told about cases from a farmer's friend or neighbor and Farm Rescue will call the farmers to encourage them to apply.

Farm Rescue began in 2006. Gross, who was raised on a family farm near Cleveland, N.D., is now the captain of a Boeing 747 for United Parcel Service, flying around the world. Although he did not go into farming as a career, he still feels a strong connection to the farming community. He said one of the best things about Farm Rescue is connecting volunteers and businesses to the agriculture community.

In many cases, the volunteers are either retired farmers or they grew up on a farm, but left for other careers.

"They want to give back to the farming community. They want to volunteer," Gross said.

Sponsors are also critical in making Farm Rescue a success. In Verendrye's service area, some of the top sponsors include RDO Equipment, Bremer Bank, Walmart, Ryan Chevrolet, Sun Prairie Grain and Westlie Truck Center. Verendrye Electric is also a sponsor, along with a number of cooperatives around the state. For a full list of sponsors, go to www.farmrescue.org.

Gross' idea for Farm Rescue started small and has grown. One day he told a friend he wanted to help farmers in need when he retired, but his friend suggested he start before he retired. He took the friend's advice and the program has grown in the five years of its existence to serve farmers in the Dakotas, eastern Montana and western Minnesota.

"It's bigger than I thought it would be, but that's good because we are helping people," Gross said.

Farm Rescue is headquartered in Jamestown and has two office workers



Farm Rescue volunteers have developed camaraderie during the long hours they put in volunteering. From left is Warren Zakopyko, Gene Spichke, Bill Krumwiede and Farm Rescue founder Bill Gross. Below: Bill Krumwiede, the first Farm Rescue volunteer, operates the tractor.

Volunteers have local connections

It takes long hours and a lot of work to be a Farm Rescue volunteer, but those who do it have fun and enjoy the camaraderie.

Three of the volunteers, Bill Krumwiede, Warren Zakopyko and Gene Spichke, have spent a lot of time together helping families. They are also Verendrye members, and two of them have ties to Verendrye. Warren was a meter reader for Verendrye Electric for many years and Bill is the father of Tim Krumwiede, who is the systems supervisor for Verendrye. Warren and Gene live in the Kief area and Bill in the Voltaire area.

Krumwiede, the first Farm Rescue volunteer, said he has put in about six weeks of volunteering this year. He found out about Farm Rescue in the newspaper. "I saw it in the Minot paper and decided to give them a call," Krumwiede said. Krumwiede is a retired mechanic who used to work at the Antelope Valley Station in Beulah for Basin Electric Power Cooperative.

They have covered a lot of territory in their time volunteering.

"I help with pretty much whatever comes up," Spichke said. Spichke is a retired farmer who learned about Farm Rescue through the KMOT Ag Expo.

Zakopyko said he likes volunteering because of the people he meets. Farm Rescue volunteers get to know the farm families well and the families often reward the volunteers with delicious meals.

"You get a nice feeling when you help people," Zakopyko said.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you want to contribute to Farm Rescue, become a sponsor or volunteer, go to www.farmrescue.org where you can also read more about Farm Rescue volunteers and the families they help. You can also call Farm Rescue at (701) 252-2017.

who are the only paid people in the organization. Farm Rescue also has a board that reviews cases and determines if the cases meet the criteria for help.

The Behms' farm marked the 121st case for Farm Rescue. This year, Farm Rescue helped 20 farms with planting and plans on helping 10 people harvest. Their assistance is limited to planting

and harvest.

The Behms get emotional when asked about how Farm Rescue has impacted their lives and Ron Behm said he plans to donate to Farm Rescue for all the help they have given them.

"Farm Rescue is a good organization and the people who volunteer to help are good people," Ron said.