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Farm Rescue helps Trail-area farmer

by David Hill
Editor

Thursday, May 21, Kevin Vettleson of Trail was ready to do his part.

Friends and his new acquaintances with Farm Rescue weren't pushing him to do more, but he wanted to help. Vettleson explained that last February he didn't know how he could get his 2,500 acres of wheat and soybeans planted. In fact, he didn't know if he would be around at all.



Last February, Vettleson was diagnosed with lung cancer. It turned his world upside down. He's ready to lick this cancer, but since the end of February he's spent every week day at the University of Minnesota undergoing cancer treatment and every night at Hope Lodge, an American Cancer Society facility, which incidentally, he believes is absolutely wonderful. That leaves little time for his 2,500-acre farm near Trail, where Vettleson lives with his wife Kim and where they raised their children Kyle and Hannah.

Vettleson was sharing his concern about not being able to plant this spring, when a friend offered to send an application for assistance to a relatively new organization called Farm Rescue.

Vettleson said he'd read about Farm Rescue before, and agreed to the offer of help.

Farm Rescue was founded by Bill Gross, a native North Dakotan and full-time pilot for UPS Airlines. Like so many farm boys before him, Gross's heart never left his family's farm and ranch at Cleveland, N.D. And like so many other farm families, his parents encouraged him to leave that farm in pursuit of a better life.

The short story about how he started Farm Rescue begins with Gross explaining to a friend what he'd like to do after he retires - go back to his roots in farm country and help others. "You see," Gross said, "so many people have left the family farm that when someone gets in

trouble - like getting cancer - there aren't enough neighbors to come to his assistance like there used to be, and because of the farm economy, it's much harder to help one another."

His friend asked why he didn't begin now. Gross realized that there was nothing standing in his way of helping now.

So, four years ago, he started Farm Rescue.

Farm Rescue does not give money. Volunteers with the non-profit charity provide labor and corporate sponsors, like RDO Equipment Company, supplies the equipment. Wal-Mart, Cargill, Cenex, Farm Credit Services and Bremer Bank are some of the other corporate sponsors.

The volunteers, who come from all over and are generally retired farmers, will plant or harvest (assistance is limited to one planting and harvesting operation every three years per family farm) up to 1,000 acres per farm family.

Initially, the organization provided assistance to about 10 farms near the Jamestown

area of North Dakota. In 2008, Farm Rescue planted or harvested crops free of charge for 36 farmers who experienced a major injury, illness or natural disaster, which was nearly double the assistance provided in 2007.

This spring, the organization received 50 applications, which are carefully reviewed by a board, and estimates it will be able to help 22 this spring, and hopefully many more this fall. Gross said the organization has grown and it now provides farm assistance to farmers in North Dakota, South Dakota, eastern Montana and western Minnesota. Gross said he would eventually like to see the organization helping more than 100 farms each year.

Gross said Farm Rescue also owes much of its success to volunteers.

Most of the volunteers are retired farmers. There are a few younger people who, like Gross, are able to volunteer, as well.



have them here. It's been big, real big."

For more information about Farm Rescue, log on to www.farmrescue.org.

A special Times interview with Gross and Vettleson can be viewed on the Thief River Falls Times' Web site at www.trftimes.com.



Farm Rescue founder Bill Gross (left) and Trail-area farmer Kevin Vettleson.

"Smokey" Wright, a retired farmer from Minot, is one of the regular volunteers. He was in Trail last week to help Vettleson.

Wright said he read about Farm Rescue while attending a farm show and decided to sign-up as a volunteer. He said he volunteered to help for a couple of reasons: because he loves to help people in need and because it still allows him to get his hands dirty.

Vettleson said he couldn't say enough about the organization. "It has meant a lot to me and my family to