

Farmer with back problem gets assistance from Farm Rescue

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BUTLER - After having surgery over the summer to address a lifelong back condition, Dan Ash thought he'd be healthy enough to harvest his crops.

A bumpy trip through the field changed his mind.

"I thought I could combine wheat," he said.

But jostling over uneven terrain hurt his back.

"That's when I said, 'I guess I won't be riding in the combine or a tractor,'" he said.

Fortunately, he's had plenty of help. Neighbors harvested his 250 acres of wheat and 350 acres of soybeans. And last weekend, the nonprofit group Farm Rescue combined his 320 acres of corn.

"It's a miracle, you know," Ash said, as a combine from Farm Rescue rolled back and forth through his cornfield while a friend drove a tractor pulling a grain cart.

[Jamestown](#), N.D.-based Farm Rescue is a nonprofit group that does planting and harvesting for family farmers who have suffered a major injury or illness or are dealing with a natural disaster.

Ash qualifies.

"It was do it or be paralyzed," he said of his lower back surgery. He said he's still in rehabilitation and could be slowed until spring.

In early August, he contacted Farm Rescue to see if the group could help with his harvest. Faron Wahl, regional operations manager, said an interview with Ash was scheduled after he applied. Ultimately, the agency's board of directors decides who to help, Wahl said.

Farm Rescue has grown considerably during its seven years of existence, Wahl said. This year, it will assist about 15 farmers in the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa and eastern Montana with their harvests. It can help about twice as many producers with planting in the spring, Wahl said. Harvesting takes more people, more equipment and more time, he said.

For corn harvesting, Farm Rescue provides a combine and a semi to haul the crop to the elevator and people to operate both, Wahl said. Often, he said, family members or neighbors also help. On Oct. 25, Tyler Loterbauer, a friend of Ash's, was running the tractor and grain cart. Having somebody do that job makes the harvest go far faster, Wahl said.

Farm Rescue operates thanks to sponsorships, grants and volunteers, Wahl said. Both Wheat Growers and North Central Farmers Elevator contribute to the agency, he said. RDO Equipment Co provides the equipment used, he said, and volunteers play a crucial role in helping the group serve farmers. The producers being helped have to account for the so-called input costs - fuel for implements, seed and fertilizer.

The harvesting of Ash's corn began on Oct. 24.

"I'm happy, really happy," Ash said. "It's just a great feeling to know you're going to get your crop out before bad weather shows up."