

Farm Rescue stretches across border to help Montana farmer

By SUE ROESLER, Farm & Ranch Guide
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DAGMAR, Mont. - For the second time in the five years since Farm Rescue has been in existence, the all-volunteer organization was in Montana helping a farm family with their crops.

Two weeks ago, Farm Rescue arrived at the Gene and Geri Andersen farm in Dagmar and planted 1,000 acres of durum.

Two years ago, Farm Rescue harvested wheat for Terry and Vicki Cayko of Fairview, Mont. Farm Rescue plants for mostly North Dakota farmers but with more sponsors on board, has been able to help in northern South Dakota and at border farms in Montana and Minnesota. The organization helps those struck by illness, disability or natural disaster.

Gene said it has been a tough year at the family farm located a few miles west of the North Dakota community of Grenora.

“With my wife sick and my son ill, the community has helped us so much,” Gene said. “Then Farm Rescue came and helped with the planting. I'm really grateful.”

It has been a devastating year for the Andersen family. His wife, Geri, who had always helped around the farm, is just beginning to recover from a stroke.

Meanwhile, his son and partner on the farm, Kerby, 32, became ill and died while waiting for a transplant at the Mayo Clinic. His funeral was held Sunday, May 23, and the entire community of Grenora came to pay their respects.



Dave Sette, a volunteer from Wisconsin, seeds durum into mustard ground on the Gene and Geri Andersen farm near Dagmar, Mont. Photo by Sue Roesler.

In photo below, Gene and Geri Andersen were helped with seeding by Farm Rescue this spring. Photo by Genita Limke.



Gene and Geri Andersen are standing in front of a white trailer with "Farm Rescue" and other logos. Gene is standing behind Geri, who is sitting in a wheelchair. The trailer has "Farm Rescue" and other logos on it.

Gene said North Dakota and Montana farmer-neighbors helped him seed his peas and lentils before Farm Rescue arrived. He will seed his yellow mustard himself, which he contracts with Montana Specialty Mills in Great Falls, Mont. He hauls the mustard to the mill's plant in Conrad, Mont.

The Andersens are planting Mountrail and Grenora durum this year, both good varieties for them.

“Mountrail is an older variety but it has worked well for us on the farm,” Gene said.

Kerby's widow, Heather, will now be his partner on the farm, he said. Kerby had loved farming, he added.

The two Farm Rescue volunteers who arrived on May 20 to seed for the Andersens attended the services for Kerby, then went back to the tractor and the truck to finish seeding.

The volunteers were Jack Limke, a UPS pilot, who brought his wife, Genita, and two daughters, along with him from Kentucky to help, and Dave Sette, a heavy equipment operator from Wisconsin who took vacation time to volunteer.

“The Andersens have a lot to deal with right now. If we can help them out in any way, we're glad to do it,” said Limke, driving the truck out to meet Sette in the field.

Limke said they were surprised by the length of the fields at the Andersen farm. They seeded durum into mustard stubble on a field three miles long the first two days they were in northeastern Montana. The field they were seeding on the weekend was one mile in length.

“Gary already put down his nitrogen, so we're driving the tractor down this long length of field seeding durum,” Limke said. “At the ends of the field, we'll go east and west a few times to cover the ends.”

They were seeding into very nice sandy soil and were also surprised to find out Gene puts some of his acres into chem fallow.

Gene said that is something he is doing less of, but there still are acres that he will burn down, then let sit idle for a year. He believes it replenishes the soil moisture, cuts down on weed problems, restores fertility and makes the field easier to work.

However, he has found that badgers move into ground that is never tilled, and he doesn't enjoy finding that, so he is doing less fallowing.

Sette took turns with Limke seeding and sleeping. They were seeding past midnight since they arrived to finish in order to make it to the next farm on the Farm Rescue schedule.

Sette said the long lengths of field were not as challenging as he originally thought, and he has

thoroughly enjoyed driving the John Deere tractor with its monitor system and auto drive steering.

“We're moving about 6 miles an hour, and this is just a beautiful view from the cab here,” Sette said. “It's no wonder they call it Big Sky Country.”

He watches to make sure the air drill is working properly and can check the monitor frequently for various readings, including fuel output.

Sette had volunteered two years ago with Farm Rescue, then had a shoulder injury last year so could not make it.

“I was anxious to get back out here. I love farming, and I'm enjoying every minute of it. For me this is the best vacation I can think of,” he said.

Sette has been surprised at all the folks who come up to the volunteers in town and say, “You helped a neighbor of mine.”

He knows it is difficult for farmers to ask for help, and it is usually their farm neighbors who call Farm Rescue.

“We're just thankful we keeping getting sponsors. Without them, we couldn't do this for farmers,” he added.

Limke said his family has been coming with him to volunteer with Farm Rescue ever since its inception in 2005. He takes vacation from his UPS pilot job and the family drives to North Dakota.

They arrived to take over for a Farm Rescue crew in Halliday in the southwestern region of North Dakota. The crew had been out of the fields due to wet, cold weather. Dave, who had been helping with a farmer in Luverne for Farm Rescue, met up with the Limkes in Halliday.

There, they seeded for the Alvin and Donna Weidner family, then headed to the far northwestern corner of North Dakota to the Tim and Marilyn Selle farm south of Fortuna. Tim injured his neck in an accident and Marilyn has multiple sclerosis.

Genita Limke said she and her daughters have always found ways to help out on the farms while Jack seeds. She bought a camera and began photographing the families and the farm operations for the Farm Rescue Web site (www.farmrescue.org), and she also does paperwork for the organization.

Genita also has been amazed by the variety of weather they have found in North Dakota. Each year, they usually arrive and it is still snowing, but there is usually sunshine by the end of their time in the state.

“We spend a lot of time waiting for the fields to dry out,” she said with a laugh.

The Limkes' daughters, Megan and Anna, like to take care of all the farm dogs and were able to ride horses at the Sette farm.

After seeding the Andersen farm, the volunteers will head to Berthold, where they will seed for another farmer.

“I'm sure we'll be back next year, too,” Genita said.

The many farmers who need Farm Rescue every spring and harvest will be glad to see her back, too.