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Farm Rescue reaches milestone with 100th family helped

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YPSILANTI, N.D. - The damp, cool weather finally broke in early November and Farm Rescue volunteers, like farmers across the region, were able to get back to harvesting.

What made this situation unique, however, was the fact this was the 100th producer the volunteer, non-profit organization was able to help since it began operating in 2006.

Farm Rescue workers descended on the farm of Dustin and Lucinda Lien, located near Ypsilanti, to help with their soybean harvest – a task made almost impossible because of Dustin’s farm accident earlier this summer. Ypsilanti is located southeast of Jamestown in Stutsman County.

The Farm Rescue organization provides planting and harvesting help free of charge for farm families that are in crisis due to a major injury, illness or natural disaster.

“This is a significant milestone for Farm Rescue and a testament to what can happen when an avenue is created that brings people and businesses together to help others in a time of crisis,” said Bill Gross, founder of Farm Rescue. “It is truly inspiring that so many people have come to rally behind Farm Rescue.”

The day was also special for one of those Farm Rescue volunteers. Bill Krumwiede of Voltaire, N.D., was the organization’s first volunteer and helped plant the crop on the first farm to receive help from Farm Rescue, Matt and Laura Biel of Dickinson. And on this day, Krumwiede was at the controls of one of the combines making passes through the Lien’s soybean field.

“I hadn’t farmed in 20 years when I told Bill (Gross) it was a wonderful idea and I had time to help,” Krumwiede said. “I just wanted to farm and do some good for people. I’m glad I’ve been a part of Farm Rescue. It’s been very rewarding.”

And the Liens are very grateful for volunteers like Krumwiede and the many sponsors who have made Farm Rescue possible.

“We don’t know what we would have done without Farm Rescue,” Dustin said. “We would have had soybeans standing in the snow because now, with everyone trying to get their own crop off, you couldn’t ask a neighbor to stop working on his fields and help with yours.”

“It’s hard to explain how thankful we are,” Lucinda added. “When you don’t know what you are going to do, this is an answer to prayer. There just aren’t words to say it.”

The Lien’s problems began back on July 21st, when Dustin was squeezed between a tractor and a pickup, resulting in a broken pelvis and knee injury. At first he thought he would heal up fast enough to be able to run the combine during



Photo by Dale Hildebrant

soybean harvest. But after hearing the specialist's prediction that he wouldn't be doing any farming for at least 4 to 6 months, he submitted an application to Farm Rescue for harvest help a day before the deadline.

Their neighbors were able to help them get the small grains off earlier this fall, but with the cool, wet weather and harvest delays the assistance from Farm Rescue was desperately needed.

Farm Rescue had two combines running this particular day. If things went well Gross estimated each combine would be able to harvest about 80 acres. Dustin reported the soybeans were running from average to a little better than average, but they were still a little wet to go directly into long-term storage. The moisture content of the beans that day was running from 15.5 to 16 percent and the local elevator was taking them in for drying.

After finishing up at the Liens, Farm Rescue will help with soybean harvest at two more farms – one just south of Fargo and another just across the river in western Minnesota – before calling it a season.

The fall harvest season has been frustrating for Farm Rescue, just as it has for all other growers who had late season crops to harvest.

"This fall has been very expensive for us," Gross said. "With the weather situation the last month or so, we have had volunteers out and we had to pay for motel rooms for them, even though they were running the combines. We had the equipment out longer than expected, which raised our insurance costs.

"We have found that harvesting segment of Farm Rescue costs from double to triple what our planting operation does, so in the future we will probably be expanding the planting help more," he said. "I don't envision the harvest aid getting any larger."

The economic downturn has also meant the sponsorship levels have dropped some, although they have a 90 percent retention rate for their sponsors. Some of those sponsors have had to drop their level of support, however. For this reason, Gross doesn't expect the program to grow for at least the next year.

"Last year we helped 36 farmers and this year, by the time we finish up with our last harvesting sites, we will have aided 35 farmers," he said. "I think that's about the number we're going to shoot for as far as helping next year."

This year was the first year they operated two planting units and two combines throughout the entire season. The second planting unit allowed them to help several farmers in South Dakota.

The organization was also able to extend their assistance to a larger area.

"This year we were planting in South Dakota only 12 miles from the Iowa border," Gross said. "The farthest east we have been is Starbuck, Minn. We have helped a few farmers in eastern Montana and we've been within 10 miles of the Canadian border on the north."

As Gross looks back over the four years Farm Rescue has been in operation, he knew that eventually they would help 100 farmers, he just didn't expect it to happen this soon.

"I didn't think it would grow so quickly to this size with this many volunteers and this many sponsors," he said. "And the reason we did grow so fast was due to the many good-hearted volunteers and the sponsors. If we didn't have the volunteers to operate the equipment and the sponsors to provide funding we would have never made it to the hundred mark."

In the farming game, there is always a planting season that arrives after the harvest season is wrapped up, and that is no different with Farm Rescue. Starting in January, Farm Rescue will begin accepting applications for planting assistance for the 2010 season and inching closer to their next milestone – helping the 200th farmer or rancher in a crisis situation.