

Farm Rescue:

Assisting Iowa's Farmers



Farm Rescue is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that plants and harvests crops free of charge for farm families who have experienced a major illness, injury or natural disaster. Operations are funded solely by donations, business sponsorships and grants.

Gary Keller (above), correspondent banker, Bell State Bank and Trust, Fargo, ND, is responsible for exposing the *Iowa Banking Magazine* to this most interesting organization. At last fall's American Agricultural Bankers Conference held in Minneapolis, Gary was in the Farm Rescue booth at the trade show. He and Bryan Matzke, a banker from Waverly, MN, serve on the board of directors. Gary was appointed to the board in November 2013.

Farm Rescue is Created

Farm Rescue was founded by Bill Gross (right), a senior pilot with U.P.S. Airlines. Bill grew up on a farm near Cleveland, ND. His family encouraged him to go to college as agriculture in the mid-

1980s was a depressed sector of the U.S. economy.

Graduating from the University of North Dakota's aviation program, Gross flew for Pan American Airlines for a few years and has now been with U.P.S. for 20 years. A participant in a number of church missions, he thought he would like to do some charitable endeavors here after he retired from flying. His first thought was that he would be a good samaritan and volunteer to help farmers put in their crops. In discussing this with his former college roommate, he was encouraged to not wait until retirement, rather start helping people now.

So in 2005, he organized Farm Rescue. It has been, from its inception, an all volunteer, not for profit

organization, that would focus on assisting farm families "in crisis." This could be a major injury, illness or a natural disaster.

Over 250 Farmers Assisted

The spring planting season of 2006 was their first year of actual assistance. They assisted ten families that year. Through 2013, Farm Rescue has helped 252 farm families, 50 of them in 2013. The first years they operated in the Dakotas, but now have spread their reach into Montana and Minnesota. 2012 marked two milestones for Farm Rescue. They assisted their 200th farm family and added Iowa to their areas of assistance.

They use volunteer labor. Their board is comprised of all volunteers and they are funded by



corporate sponsorships and donations. Their equipment is provided by RDO Equipment Company, a John Deere distributor, an exclusive arrangement dating back to 2006. Additionally, RDO Truck Centers became a sponsor in 2012. They sell/lease Mack, Volvo, Izuzu and UD trucks.

In 2012 Wilson Trailer Company became a sponsor. Puklich Chevrolet, Ryan Chevrolet (Minot, ND) and the 22 certified Heartland Chevrolet dealers in the Red River Valley of Minnesota and North Dakota round out the equipment sponsors.

Sponsorships are Key

Funding sponsorship is categorized by tiers with the highest being \$100,000 (Premier). They are RDO Equipment, Walmart, Bremer Bank and the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

The next level, Diamond Sponsors (\$50,000) are Clear Channel Outdoor and Newman Outdoor Advertising.

\$25,000 sponsors (Emerald) are KSB (600AM) Radio, the *Tri-State Neighborhood Farm & Ranch Guide*, *Iowa Farmer Today*, *The Minnesota Farm Guide* and the North Dakota Farmers Union.

At the Platinum (\$10,000) level there are 20 investors including Monsanto's Asgrow & DeKalb.

Gold Sponsors (\$5,000) include 34 companies. There are 23 Silver Sponsors (\$2,500), Bronze Sponsors (\$1,000) number well over 100 and are as varied as the Alpha Gamma Rho Collegiate Fraternity to electrical co-operatives to credit unions. In their published brochure, there are 14 banks listed as sponsors.

Sponsors' donations are employed in the state they are from (i.e., North Dakota donations are used in North Dakota.)

How the Program Works

Applying or referring a family that may be in need of assistance due to a major injury, illness or natural disaster to the Farm Rescue program is simple. Applications are available on the organization's website or call 701-252-2017.

Often it is a neighbor, business, or banker who refers a family. Farm Rescue then contacts the family to see if they could use a helping hand to make it through an unexpected crisis.

Iowa Families Receive Help

Daryl and Marla DeGroot (below) of Hull was the first Iowa family assisted by this program. Farm Rescue planted their 2013 crop as Daryl was incapacitated by a recurrence of a severe staff infection from an operation replacing a knee. Of their 450 acres, 270 were



Iowa Sponsors

Upon their initiation of assistance to Iowa farmers, they sought out sponsorships from within Iowa's commercial and agricultural sectors. Their brochure lists the following Iowa sponsors (in addition to the previously mentioned Premier Sponsors):

- Pizza Ranch
- Stine Seed Co.
- Lamar Advertising
- Clear Channel Outdoor
- DuPont/Pioneer
- KICD (AM1240 & FM98.3) Radio
- Heritage Iron
- Farm Credit of Central Iowa
- WHO News Radio (AM1040)
- Vander Haag's, Inc.
- Winfield (Answer Plot & Croplan)
- KHK-Hawk Country (FM107) Radio
- First Citizens Bank (Sioux Center)
- Key Cooperative
- Sudenga Industries, Inc.
- Cooperative Credit Company
- American State Bank (Sioux Center)
- KMA (AM960 & FM99.1) Radio



in corn and 140 in soybeans. They also raise livestock. They learned of Farm Rescue through a friend who is also a volunteer for the organization. Marla went on-line and made an application. They were then interviewed by another volunteer who made a presentation to the board of directors on their behalf.

Ron and Diane Ogle of New Virginia (below) had a different circumstance. Ron became incapacitated with a cancerous brain tumor as they were beginning to transition some of their land from the CRP program to another Department of Agriculture program. The transition requires the planting of prairie grass on the acreage.

Ron's brother had seen an article about Farm Rescue and Diane contacted them to begin the process of applying. Farm Rescue saw to it that the prairie grasses got planted.

Growth Realized

Gross' vision was that Farm Rescue would be a charitable venture. All of Farm Rescue's directors are non-paid volunteers. Their labor is provided by volunteers from all walks of life and from all over the country.

The scope of their operations has grown to a level that requires three employees. They have hired an office manager, Shera DuToit, to run their office in Jamestown, ND. They also have a regional operations manager, Faron Wahl, who supervises the projects and volunteers when they are engaged.

This past year they added a marketing and communications coordinator in the person of Dani-

elle Abbas (left). She is a recent graduate of Iowa State University and coordinates the marketing and communications needs of Farm Rescue from her residence in Ames, IA.

Fund Raising Events

In addition to the fund raising obtained through donations and sponsors, Farm Rescue hosts an annual dinner in Bismarck, ND. It is complete with national name entertainment and recognizes the volunteers and the farm families that have received assistance.

The banquet this year will be held Saturday, November 1, at the Ramada Plaza & Suites in Fargo, ND. The social hour will begin at 5pm with dinner at 6pm, followed by country music artist Jason Brown performing a live concert.

In 2013, to supplement their funding, Farm Rescue conducted a raffle throughout the year. For a \$100 raffle ticket, the buyer could win one of seven prizes.

Farm Rescue will hold the raffle event again in 2014. Ticket sales are limited to 350 and rules can be found on their website. This year's prizes will include:

- Honda FourTrax Rancher™ All-Terrain Vehicle
- John Deere D110 Riding Lawn Mower
- Samsung 40-inch Plasma Television
- Apple iPad 32GB
- Apple iPad Mini 16GB
- \$500 Walmart Gift Card
- \$500 STOP-FYRE™ Fire Extinguisher

Additionally, Farm Rescue offers in mahogany frames, the famous prints of "The Beautiful Hands of a Farmer" and "The Beautiful Hands of a Farmer's Wife." These cost \$109 each when framed with matting and \$55 unframed. The size of the prints are 16"x 20".

During the interview with Bill Gross, it was learned that volunteers are needed to expand Farm Rescue's assistance efforts in Iowa. He concluded his comments by saying, "The best thing about Farm Rescue is that it provides opportunities for people and businesses to help farm families."

For information, contact Danielle Abbas at Farm Rescue, PO Box 1100, Jamestown, ND 58402. Call 701-252-2017 or email danielle@farmrescue.org.

