

Farm Rescue helps hurt farmers

by Raylene Frankhauser Nickel

Late last summer when harvesting season was merely weeks away, Dustin Lien took a wrong step while servicing haying equipment.

Freakish circumstances trapped him between a tractor tire and a pickup. The tractor moved, grinding Dustin's body between the machines, breaking his pelvis, crushing ribs and tearing ligaments in his knee.

The aftermath of the accident brought a logjam of difficulty. Simply healing and walking was hard enough. Yet there was also the question concerning the farm work: How were he and his wife, Lucinda, to harvest their wheat and soybeans?

The Liens, members of Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative, farm near Ypsilanti. Their son, Ian, was barely 3 months old at the time. These demands, combined with the circumstances of the accident, challenged their ability to handle their own harvest.

Yet the prospect of losing their crops was unthinkable. "We've been farming for less than 10 years, and we're still growing," Lucinda says. "It would have been devastating if our crops had stayed in the field."

Then a friend suggested they apply for help from Farm Rescue. Lucinda completed an application, and soon the Liens learned that volunteer harvesters from Farm Rescue would indeed combine their beans.

In the meantime, neighbors Dale Marks and Adam Sperr harvested the Liens' wheat. And later, when the Farm Rescue crew arrived to harvest soybeans, neighbor Jay Graves donated bin space so the combiners wouldn't have to wait for space in the local elevator.

Since its start in 2006, Farm Rescue, which holds headquarters in Jamestown, has helped more than 100 families from North Dakota, South Dakota, eastern Montana and western Minnesota with planting and harvesting crops. The Liens were the 100th family.

"We give actual assistance to farmers who cannot do the work themselves because of illness,



Bill Gross, left, founded Farm Rescue to assist farmers like **Dustin and Lucinda Lien**, the 100th family helped by the nonprofit organization.

injury or natural disaster," says Pam Musland, Farm Rescue director of operations. "We don't give money to farmers or help in bankruptcy cases. We want to know that the families we are helping will continue to farm and continue to enrich the rural countryside through their presence and work."

The assistance includes labor and equipment provided free of charge. The farmer is responsible for providing fuel, seed and fertilizer.

The Farm Rescue volunteers will plant or harvest a maximum of 1,000 acres at a single farm and usually plant or harvest only one crop. This permits them to move on quickly to the next farm family in need.

One of the volunteers frequently taking a turn in the tractor seat is Farm Rescue founder Bill Gross, a commercial airline pilot who was born and raised on a farm in North Dakota. "My retirement dream was to get a big John Deere tractor and a big planter and just go around helping family farmers in need," he says.

A conversation with an encouraging friend caused Gross, just 38 at the time, to act on his dream sooner rather than later. Using his own seed money, he launched Farm Rescue in 2005 as a nonprofit organization.

"Farm Rescue is operated mainly by volunteers, and donations from businesses and individuals help fund overall operations," he says.

The RDO Equipment Company donates John Deere farm equipment, including two tractors with no-till drills and two combines.

Additional sponsors include 100

businesses, organizations and rural electric cooperatives.

Most of the volunteers who work in the fields and marshal equipment from farm to farm are from the Dakotas, but some come from as far afield as Pennsylvania and Kentucky.

"We've got a core group of volunteers, and they operate like a well-oiled machine," Musland says. "We just give them the farm location and explain the case. They take it from there."

Retired farmer Gene Spichke, Kief, is part of the core team who takes the lead in tackling each job. "Everyone knows what to do and how to do it, and we just all work together," says Spichke, whose farm is served by Verendrye Electric Cooperative. "The good Lord didn't put us here just to work for ourselves. We're here to help others."

While Farm Rescue accepts donations from individuals year-round, the organization is also staging a summer fund-raiser, a contest called Rolling with Farm Rescue. Entrants obtain a contest card and then drive, cycle, bike or skateboard to six different Cause route sponsors to obtain six stamps on their card. The stamped contest cards must be returned to the Farm Rescue office by Aug. 21. The cards go into a drawing for a motorcycle, which is being donated by Stutsman Harley-Davidson.

For Lucinda and Dustin Lien, the harvesting help was little short of a miracle. "It's hard to imagine how we would have gotten our soybeans in without help from Farm Rescue," she says.

For more information about Farm Rescue, visit www.farmrescue.org; e-mail info@farmrescue.org, or call (701) 252-2017. Farm Rescue will receive applications for harvesting assistance anytime throughout the summer or harvest season.

Individuals can donate online at the Web site or by mailing donations to Farm Rescue, P.O. Box 1100, Jamestown, ND 58402. ■

Raylene Frankhauser Nickel writes from her farm home near Kief.