

## Garrett McFadgen Benefit/Farm Rescue Planting By Chelsey Schaefer

Imagine that you have a job you love, but it's really more of a lifestyle. A very active lifestyle; including ranching (the cow/calf kind), farming, and running a gravel business.

Now suppose that you have suffered an injury serious enough to necessitate a ride in the Life Flight helicopter, leaving the family you work with short one very important cog in the machine. All the other family members working on the ranch also have a job elsewhere, so for them to step in your shoes would mean complications at work for both your dad (Jim McFadgen) and your brother (Tyler). Your sister (Ashley) is graduating high school soon, so she's at school all day too.

Now what do you do, with fields waiting to be worked and planted?

That was the situation facing Garrett McFadgen earlier this spring, when a group of heavy panels fell on him. His T-12 vertebra was shattered, along with a few ribs. Three more vertebrae in his spine were fractured, and his right leg was injured.

Despite all that, his spinal cord remained intact. That's very important for future mobility: Without a functional spinal cord, paralysis is the result.

Garrett isn't paralyzed, though, and is walking around really well these days. He even has hopped in the payloader or the digger a few times. He grinned when I asked him if he was supposed to be in those machines at this point in his recovery and didn't sound contrite at all when he said "Nope, not yet. But it wasn't really that bumpy."

Since he isn't *supposed* to be running equipment at this moment, that's bad news for the crop that needs planting.

That's when Farm Rescue came into the picture.

Receiving a call from Tyler's mother-in-law, Field Operations Manager Luke Benedict heard the story of Garrett's injury. From there, he called a few other family members until he was directed to Jim. At the same time, Garrett was in surgery for his injuries and the family didn't yet know whether he would come out of it able to walk or paralyzed.

"It was a very emotional time for the family." Mr. Benedict said. He hadn't intended to call at such a delicate time, but he said that Jim was able to talk with him for a good long while while Garrett underwent surgery.

I don't know about you, but I would have been happy to have received an offer of assistance and a distraction if my son were in surgery with such outcomes as a possibility. I didn't ask Jim his opinion on that (he was busy working with the Farm Rescue crew), but it worked out, because four Farm Rescue volunteers were beginning to plant the McFadgen farmland on Tuesday, May 18th.

Mr. Benedict is the senior Field Operations Manager for all seven states that Farm Rescue is active in, which includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas. He trains the volunteers and makes sure everybody is ready to operate large farm equipment before watching closely as they plant, harvest, make hay, drive semis, or feed livestock that belongs to a family in need of manpower because of a serious injury, illness, or natural disaster. Mr. Benedict grew up on a farm near Sabin, Minnesota, and continues enjoying the farm scene with his work at Farm Rescue.

The four volunteers currently operating the McFadgen planting near Valley City are Matt Blaylock, Chris Batdorf, Chris Davison, and Jeff Barnes. All four men currently work at the John Deere headquarters in Moline, Illinois and this is their first Farm Rescue volunteer job. That's a little unusual, Mr. Benedict tells me. "Usually, I put them with a volunteer who has experience working for Farm Rescue. All four of these guys are new."

Despite their newness to the program, they have plenty of knowledge- and what they're operating is a John Deere 9470R; a 470-horsepower, 4 wheel drive giant workhorse with dual tires (adding up to 8 tires total!). And behind that big green tractor is a 60-foot planter that has a very intricate system of suction, seeds blown down tubes, an electric motor on each meter (the name for the unit that does the planting), and a few other bells and whistles. Mr. Jeff Barnes explained the planting process while we watched the big center tanks get their fill of soybeans- about 100 bushels, he said. "That should plant about 100 acres, [getting] the seed about 1 ½ inches deep." Mr. Barnes is the Product Marketing Manager, dealing especially with planters like the one he was demonstrating to me. The tractor had two big screens inside the cab, which are definitely different in appearance than baler monitors, which are smaller rectangles with many fewer buttons. Mr. Barnes demonstrated a few of the functions on the screen, one of which was that each planting unit has its own little bar. If a unit is putting down too much or too little seed, it's immediately visible on the monitor. The hydraulic lift of the entire planter was also demonstrated when the guys filling up the center tank needed it up just a few inches. Mr. Barnes waited for the okay (meaning everyone was out of the way and safe) before he gently touched the hydraulic lever and the whole planter rose noiselessly a few inches off the ground. He laughed as he said "I have to know how to operate the tractor to make my planter work," and so, they aren't suffering from lack of knowledge.

The Farm Rescue crew had plenty of practice driving the tractor on the road: Mr. Matt Blaylock, who works in marketing at John Deere (also at the John Deere Headquarters in Moline, Illinois) told me that they drove them up from Breckenridge! That was nearly a five-hour trip in a tractor that only moves at 25 miles per hour.

Mr. Blaylock says he heard about Farm Rescue from a previous Deere retiree. It's a common practice for retired John Deere employees (or farmers and ranchers) to volunteer their time with Farm Rescue, Mr. Blaylock tells me, because they have the skills to operate the big machines and the time to do so.

This Farm Rescue crew of four are all young, current employees at John Deere, but Mr. Blaylock cited a desire for travel as part of the reason that they volunteered for a trip four states away, over two and up two. "We're usually on the road [one-third] of the year." he said, smiling.

He was part of the virtual benefit concert to raise money for Farm Rescue that took place last December. It was called "The Farm Must Go On," which is a fitting motto for a program that helps family farms go on despite serious injuries, illnesses, or natural disasters.

The other two members of the crew were Chris Batdorf and Chris Davison, who also work at John Deere, on the 5-series tractors and the John Deere website, according to Mr. Blaylock. The two 'Chris'es were occupied filling up the planter for their next 100 acres, and so I did not get to interview them, but the John Deere parts lookup on their website is top-notch for user-friendliness. They do their jobs at John Deere well!

When I talked to the crew, they were 90 acres into the field that Garrett tells me is 500 acres. "We have 200 acres [closer to home] that'll be planted to corn and ninety more acres over there [gesturing across the road] that will also be corn." Garrett says.

Farm Rescue helping the McFadgens plant is only part of the future plan for them. Coming up in just a few weeks on June 12th is the barbecue benefit at the Sodbuster Club in Sibley, North Dakota. There will be a freewill offering barbecue dinner beginning at 5 pm, followed by a live auction from 7 to 8 pm and then a dance immediately afterward until 11pm. Tickets for the dance are free for ten-and-unders, \$15 for 11-20 year olds, and \$30 for those 21 and older. Playing will be Powerglide, a rock, country, and rockabilly group. For further questions, contact Garrett's sister-in-law Jaclyn McFadgen at 701-320-9016.

The live auction includes an aerial spray application (a \$1500 value), a Smiles Orthodontics \$500 gift certificate, and a calving package worth \$500, among many other items, one of which is a western-style wall decoration too big to fit through the door donated by one of Garrett's neighbors.

A benefit is a good way for us to give to those in need in our local communities because of a crazy accident like Garrett's. There have been several benefits lately for farm-related injuries, which doesn't surprise Garrett's dad Jim, who says that farming or ranching is definitely one of (if not the) most dangerous occupations.

The knowledge that our community can come together in support of a local guy like Garrett is important for the mental welfare of the other farmers, who often think of the 'what-ifs.'

At Garrett's benefit, we all can eat some good food, visit with our friends and neighbors, enjoy the auction, and dance at the concert while supporting our community. What's not to love?