



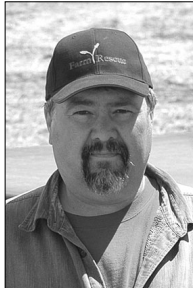
The Farm Rescue crew handles the planting of the Backman field on Wednesday afternoon in rural Wilton.

MICHAEL JOHNSON

Backman receives a helping hand from Farm Rescue

BY MICHAEL JOHNSON
Editor

When Merlin Backman felt the snap in his arm last March, he knew that something just wasn't right. But like many hard working men and women, he ignored the pain to get back to preparing for the spring planting season. Two weeks later when the pain was still there, he went in to see a doctor who told Backman he tore his bicep tendon.



Backman

Unlike a sheared-off pin on the tractor, he couldn't just fix it and continue on. The doctor told Backman that he was not to lift anything over five pounds for several months after the surgery. He would not be able to continue regular lifting activity for another six months.

That's some hard news to swallow when you've got a long farm season ahead.

Backman, a Wilton farmer, felt a bit helpless in a time that he needed to be at full strength if he was going to get his crop of wheat and flax in. His kids Logan, 15, Nicholas, 11, and Kesley, 7, are not quite ready

to run the machinery and make the necessary steps to get the planting done. But his kids, wife, Carla, father and neighbors have all been helping where they can and helped prepare the best they could for the helping hand of Farm Rescue.

Shortly after his surgery, Backman decided to give Farm Rescue a call to see if they could help. He had his answer just a few days later. Not only would a devoted tractor operator from New York show up to drive tractor. On top of that, a man who had decided to volunteer his time in all fifty states showed up. On top of that, the founder of Farm Rescue, Bill Gross, showed up to make sure the job, one of about 20 in North Dakota, would be completed on schedule.

Farm Rescue was established six years ago by Gross as a way to help those that didn't have the resources to plant or harvest their crop due to health issues. He realized that there were fewer kids at home to help take over the farm in need. Farms get bigger, families migrate and the work never stops.

"There are fewer farm families," Gross said. "I just thought there should be a plan that farm families can turn to."

The crews of drivers for Farm Rescue are all volunteers and do it for the joy of helping

others and being able to plant on some other farmer's field in some other tractor. Gross considers it far less stressful than actually worrying about your own cropland. Many of the volunteers, about half, come from out of state just to help out.

"They hear about Farm Rescue and it strikes a chord," Gross said. "It's a way to return to their roots."

So the crew showed up to return to those roots Wednesday morning to get to work with a John Deere tractor and air seeder from RDO Equipment Co. of Washburn.

The day was something that Backman was pleased to see.

"I didn't know what I was going to do," Backman said while watching the crew working at seeding the field along Hwy. 41. He even considered waiting to have surgery until after planting just so he wouldn't worry about the long healing process.

But he could see that he made the right choice.

"It was sort of an answer to prayers," Backman said.

It wasn't long and the crew realized that the seeder was in need of a bolt that had been misplaced. That was a job Backman could handle. He was glad to pick up the part and some sandwiches for the guys. For now he can handle being the go-fer.