

FARM NEWS

Rescuing farmers in crisis

Retired farmer finds volunteer work satisfying, soul enriching

By **CLAYTON RYE**
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GOODELL — Keith Barkema, a retired farmer in Wright County, is having “a joyous time” doing what he likes most.

Farming. Farming for those in crisis through Farm Rescue.

“It’s how I spent my summer vacation,” Barkema said.

Farm Rescue, based out of Jamestown, N.D., is active in North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and eastern Montana, assisting farmers in crisis with labor and machinery.

It recently helped its 100th farm family since 2006.

Farm Rescue started when founder Bill Gross, who grew up on a farm near Cleveland, N.D., was piloting a jet for his employer, UPS, across the Pacific Ocean.

His co-pilot asked him what he was going to do in retirement.

From Farm Rescue’s website, Gross answered playfully, “I’m going to be his Good Samaritan that buys a tractor and goes around and helps farm families plant their crops.”

He remembered his own father worrying about what would happen to their farm in the event of a debilitating

accident.

After realizing that Gross was serious, his co-pilot asked, “Well, why wait until you retire?”

In 2005, Farm Rescue was started.

Today, Farm Rescue accomplishes its mission with equipment donated by companies, volunteers who show up to run that equipment, and with grants and donations from a wide range of backers.

Assistance is available for planting, harvesting and haying.

It operates with a staff of five to ensure that most funds end up assisting those in need.

“Farm Rescue is a hand up, not a handout,” said Danielle Abbas, marketing communications coordinator.

Farmers helped by Farm Rescue are responsible for diesel fuel and inputs such



KEITH AND SHARON BARKEMA pose with the Farm Rescue semi that he’s scheduled to leave for North Dakota this week to deliver wheat during harvest for a farmer being assisted by Farm Rescue.

as seed, fertilizer and plastic wrap for bales.

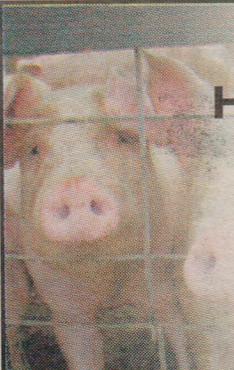
Barkema, of Goodell, saw Farm Rescue’s combines, grains carts and semi on U.S. Highway 18 in northwest Iowa one day.

He checked out Farm Rescue’s website and completed an application last spring to volunteer as he was finishing planting his soybeans.

On Memorial Day weekend, he got a call that a farmer south of Boone needed help baling.

A neighbor had a Farmall 450 tractor to pull the baler

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Rescue

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l Barkema stacked 400 bales on the rack with a man from Merville, he said. On July 6, Barkema was asked to deliver a Farm Rescue sign used on the 100 Tractor Ride to Fargo, N.D. From Fargo, Keith and Ron Barkema pulled their camper to Washburn, N.D., where a farmer had 100 acres of hay to be baled to feed his cattle this winter.

A new John Deere tractor was hitched to a new John Deere baler, donated by John Deere Equipment Co., harvested 2,500 round bales.

Barkema said this was a good deal, as he buys used equipment for his own farm. "Using new machinery that doesn't break down — or if it does, the warranty pays for repairs — is something I've never used to."

"We baled for a week straight," said Barkema. "When the couple left the

farm, Barkema said the farmer and his brother had tears in their eyes.

"I came on the yard a stranger," Barkema said, "and left an adopted son. It was quite an experience."

However, before getting home, the Barkemas were redirected to Richardton, N.D., and then to Sisseton, S.D., where he mowed hay for two days and ran a 30-foot dump rake.

On July 17, the Barkemas were headed for home, but got a call to go to Des Moines because the Farm Rescue semi would not start.

He got it started, but noticed the semi was in need of brakes. He drove the semi to his farm and installed brakes on the truck in his shop, where he services his own four semi-trucks.

"I'm having a joyous time," said Barkema.

This week, Barkema is scheduled to drive the Farm Rescue truck to Wing,

N.D., where he will use it to deliver wheat for a grower.

Abbas said Farm Rescue volunteers form lifelong relationships with the people they help.

A banquet is held every year for those farmers who have been helped, the volunteers and the supporters of Farm Rescue.

This year's banquet will be Nov. 1 in Fargo, N.D.

Retired farmers volunteer to help as a way to stay active doing what they enjoy.

Volunteers with no experience are welcome as they will be paired with an experienced farmer.

Abbas said more than half of the farmers assisted are nominated by a relative, friend or sponsor.

When learning they will be helped by Farm Rescue, Abbas said, "Farmers can't talk. These big, tough farmers are overwhelmed someone would help."



KEITH BARKEMA, in orange cap, stacks bales of hay earlier this summer near Boone, as a volunteer for Farm Rescue.

-Contributed photo