



November 2, 2007

FARMERS HELPING FARMERS

Farmers in Saline County are no strangers to adversity locally, especially after the spring of 2004 with the devastating tornado damage. Farmers contend with storm damage to buildings and crops, uncertain weather conditions, rising input costs and volatile markets. But for many producers, the greatest concern may be the threat of disability or life threatening illness. In the old days, you could rely on help from your neighbors, but across the United States, that is not always the case anymore.

A farm scene on October 25th in Saline County near Swanton, proved that neighbors are willing to help neighbors, farmers helping farmers, is still alive and well and something everyone can be proud of. It was a second memorial in a sense to an area farmer that had fallen to cancer in his 50's, Richard Kratochvil. After wheat harvest this year, Richard and his spouse Nancy learned for the first time he was terminally ill with cancer. As it turned out, there were only 60 days to get affairs in order. There was time to sell livestock and talk about things that are very hard to talk about, including succession of the farm. At the same time, there was no way that Nancy could have imagined the farm scene that came together on her farm fields this fall.

Things were not going well with harvest, farmers had signed up to help but the rains and mud slowed all the plans. Finally, the end of October we experienced a week in a row of dry weather, and neighbors and farmers on the harvest list were called by leader and neighbor, Alan Strouf, for one big harvest push. A majority on the volunteer list were not done with harvest themselves but it didn't matter. Alan directed harvest equipment to fields, even shortening distances for the helpers.

On a perfect fall harvest day, when soybeans and sorghum could be harvested the same day, an army of agricultural equipment came together. Two semi trucks, a dozen straight trucks, three tractors and auger wagons and 14 combines hit the fields for one common goal, helping a fallen neighbor. The old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together," it's true with farmers! A field of soybeans had four gleaner combines going all at once, the "gleaner field." The leader said this happened by chance but it created quite the farm scene.

Overall, there had been 19 combines, 22 trucks, 7 tractors and grain carts in the fields getting the fall harvest brought in. Over 50 people were involved with running the equipment or helping with this harvest in some way or another. There were even some people who offered to help but they ran out of fields to get them into.

Nancy shared pictures of the farm scenes with me at the Extension office last week along with 4-H secretary Becky Vales, whose husband Mike helped. A family friend took a small plane and flew Nancy over top the Swanton farm scene to see results from the air. A bird's eye view on a perfect farm scene day.

Nancy could have hired a custom harvest operation to complete the 2007 farm year, but neighbors were not going to allow that to happen. The community coming together, including local



businesses who helped with the lunch, wanted to help bring in a bountiful harvest because this was a way to help. In a way, it is a final tribute to a good neighbor, a big help to his spouse Nancy, and would serve as a part of the healing process.

Way to go! Other examples of neighbor to neighbor helping with planting or harvest have happened in our area the past several years. Faith, family, neighbors helping neighbors, farmers helping farmers, hard work, free enterprise, and independence. It doesn't get any better than that.

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