

After Tornado 'You've Got To Do What You've Got To Do'

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the healthy stance of wheat showed no damage from the former tornado. But the wheat camouflaged danger that inflicted heavy losses to equipment.

"I had spent \$20,000 to fix the combine after it was damaged from the tornado. I just got it back and before we even had one-fourth of the bin filled, I had three flat tires and had to constantly stop because of all the debris we were running into," Mertz said.

Frustrated by the impossibility of harvesting at that rate of speed, a neighbor, whose religion doesn't allow rubber tires, offered his steel-wheeled equipment to finish the wheat harvesting.

After the wheat was cut, a group of neighbors walked the fields again and picked up six or seven more trailer loads of debris.

"And it isn't cleared yet. Every time we walk the fields, we keep finding stuff," Larry said.

The inside of the Mertz home is no longer a haven to relax. For the last three months, they have endured the constant peppering shots of a nail gun, the whine of saws, and hammering. Workmen are everywhere.

And danger is rampant for the Mertz's grandchildren who live on the property and are constantly underfoot. The small children can't seem to get in the habit of wearing shoes and have sustained numerous cuts and imbedded metal on their bare feet. Curious, the children like to watch the workmen, but the adults worry about injuries to children who sometimes get in the way.

Despite the family's best efforts, splinters of glass continue to be found in upholstery, beds, floors, and furnishings. Floors are muddied from ongoing traffic.

Recently, the Mertz family recounted how they had been on the lookout for a tornado since they had heard of a tornado watch reported on the weather channel in May. Larry and Carol had even summoned family members who live in a modular home on the farm to seek shelter in the basement. After the weather channel lifted the warning, the family assumed

danger was over and returned to life as usual.

An hour later, the lights went out and the wind started blowing. The tornado struck before the couple could pull the basement door shut.

"By the time we got to the basement, it was all over," Carol said.

They had heard the shattering glass and the roof sucked off the house. When they went outside and saw the devastation, one of the sons asked, "Is it worth rebuilding?"

That first night, neighbors helped to stretch a tarp across the attic to keep the rain from damaging the rest of the house.

Electrical lines were installed from the house to power up the computer to transmit data back and forth to the milking parlor. Fortunately the milking parlor computer ran the milker after it was hooked up to the generator.

By 2:30 a.m., the generator was running and feeding was begun. The family started milking at the usual time at 3:30 a.m.

Generators were used for milking for three days.

"I didn't sleep for three nights," Larry recalled, remembering the stress and pressure of caring for the herd and coping with cleanup.

"The cows held up better than I thought," Larry said.

Although the cows initially panicked and one split from trying to escape a cement block wall, amazingly milk production remained steady. However, the herd has had five abortions since the tornado—a side effect that Larry attributes to the tornado.

They also seem a bit nervous from all the noise of rebuilding.

Some of the herd is registered, but Mertz and his sons are more interested in seeing how much milk goes into the tank rather than pedigrees. Members of DHIA, the herd has a rolling herd average of about 22,000 pounds.

The Mertz's estimate they have \$300,000 damage from the tornado. They are unsure how much will be covered by insurance.

"We did things to save the insurance company money. The barn peak isn't as high so we lost stor-

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"Some days we just want to give up. But we can't let it like this. This is what we do," Larry said of farming. Larry and Carol, her mother Marion Fitzgerald, sons Mike and Steve, and grandchildren Chad, 10, and Evan, 6, and Allen, 14, find that milking 130 cows and farming 385 acres are not easy tasks while cleaning up tornado damage. "We are stressed to the max. We're working day and night with no end in sight," Larry said.



The Mertz family is grateful to the many volunteers who helped rebuild and cleanup after tornado damage.

Community Pulls Together During Tornado Cleanup

The losses victims suffer from tornados is phenomenal, and not something anyone would choose. Although many neighbors escape the ravages of tornados, they too experience losses. And what makes this significant is that their losses are voluntary. "Many people went without a paycheck the week after the tornado because they were here everyday cleaning up," Judy Kurtz said of the community help they received after a tornado destroyed their home and farm property.

Numerous neighbors provided meals everyday for two weeks dur-

ing cleanup efforts in Berks County. In order to cook and serve sometimes as many as 300 persons during cleanup, homemakers were unable to clean their own homes and keep up with yardwork. In addition to volunteering time, they spent their own money to provide food for the crews.

Life hasn't been normal for much of the community.

"These times really help you get to know your neighbors better," said Beth Kurtz, sister-in-law and neighbor to Luke Kurtz, the farm that was destroyed by the tornado on May 31.



Neighbors provided meals for cleanup crews during the many weeks of tornado clean up and rebuilding.