

Pals join Nelson to aid farmers

■ His Farm Aid concert draws 50 performers and 50,000 fans.

The Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Willie Nelson's populist charity work strikes the same chord with fans and music pals that his singing does. His fifth Farm Aid concert is expected to raise more than \$1 million for rural aid groups.

"It's something that everyone who eats should brush up on," Nelson said of America's family farmers. "The people who grow their food are losing their homes, losing their land."

Nearly 50 artists and groups joined in the 12-hour benefit Saturday before 50,000 people and a nationwide cable TV audience.

"Willie has started a thing that has helped a lot of people," said singer Eddie Rabbitt, performing for the first time at a Farm Aid show.

"He didn't have to be very persuasive at all," Paul Simon said

of Nelson's invitation to perform. "I admire his work, and I admire what he's doing here."

The concert at Texas Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys, was blessed with sunny, 80-degree weather. About half the concert was broadcast on cable's The Nashville Network.

Among other performers were John Mellencamp, Richard Marx, the Kentucky Headhunters, Asleep at the Wheel, Tracy Chapman, Kris Kristofferson and Waylon Jennings. Comedians Roseanne and Tom Arnold and Steve Allen introduced some of the acts.

While the farm foreclosure crisis that spurred Nelson to begin Farm Aid in 1985 has slowed, he and others at the concert emphasized that problems persist in rural America.

Health insurance, dying hospitals and low crop prices are daily worries, they said. The availability of financing has tightened since the upheaval in the nation's banks and thrifts.

"Credit is very scarce," said

Betty Puckett, who runs a Farm Aid-supported assistance hotline in Lecompte, La. "They're looking at cash flow and past history. And the recent past has been low production, low prices and disasters."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson has been at all five Farm Aid concerts.

"It's clear to me that the disregard for the plight of family farmers and rural America runs parallel to the disregard for workers in urban America," he said.

Nelson said: "The farm economy is related to the national economy. It's the domino effect we've been talking about since 1985. First it was the farmers, now it's General Motors."

For singer Michelle Shocked, playing Farm Aid was less a political cause than a chance to come home.

"I feel very relaxed because I know where these people come from," said Shocked, who grew up in Gilmer, Texas. "I come from the same place."