It is hard for me to express in words what I would like to say, but I will give it a try. Thanks, Kenny! After many years working in the Agronomy Division for Farmers Ranchers Co-op, serving the last several years as division manager, Kenny Eggers announced last summer that he was going to retire effective this winter. At that time it seemed like a long way off, but here we are, and it is time to say ‘goodbye.’

I appreciate Kenny’s dedication to the company and to our customers over the past two decades. It is difficult to go anywhere in our Sandhills region where Kenny doesn’t know who lives on the place or what field needs to be sprayed. I will miss our heart-to-heart talks and his recollection of customers, both past and present. All of us at Farmers Ranchers Co-op wish Kenny all the best. Please join us during the annual meeting March 1, where we will be honoring Kenny with coffee, cake, and time to visit. We hope you stop by to thank him for his years of service and reminisce with this Farmers Ranchers Co-op veteran a bit yourself.

Welcome, Justin...

I am pleased to introduce to you Justin Nelson, our new agronomy manager. Justin has spent many years in the agronomy industry, including time with Farmers Ranchers Co-op. He has a good knowledge of the region, our customer base, and the agronomic needs for area crops. He is excited to be in his new role. If you haven’t had an opportunity to meet Justin, I encourage you to stop by the fertilizer plant and have a visit. Justin is a great addition to our cooperative team and we welcome him.

We’ve included profiles of both Kenny and Justin inside this issue of Trailhead. I hope you enjoy them!

Don’t Miss the Annual Meeting March 1

Have we got a lineup for you! In addition to conducting the normal business of the 2014 Farmers Ranchers Cooperative Annual Meeting, your cooperative has arranged an event worth attending on March 1. There will be dinner as well as cake and coffee time to honor Kenny Eggers, who is retiring as manager of our Agronomy Division.

Farmers Ranchers will also be recognizing the Beel family—brothers Frank, Henry, Adam, and their families. These longtime Farmers Ranchers Co-op members and third-generation Johnstown-area ranchers were the 2013 recipients of the prestigious Leopold Conservation Award, which honors Nebraska landowner achievement in voluntary stewardship and management of natural resources.

To cap off the event, come listen to Yvonne Hollenbeck, top award-winning cowgirl poet in America. Named Female Poet of the Year in multiple years, Yvonne will entertain with mostly humorous poems that focus on her ranching experiences with husband Glen on their Clearfield, SD, ranch.

Annual Meeting

Let me officially invite all of you to the Farmers Ranchers Cooperative Annual Meeting on March 1, 2014. You are the cooperative, and so what better time to come and find out what your co-op has accomplished and its plans for the future. Details follow. I hope to see you there!
**Valentine: Tires and So Much More**

By Kelly Stenka, Mr. Tire Valentine Manager. 402-376-2060, kstenka@frcoop.com

When you drive by the Mr. Tire store along U.S. Highway 20 in Valentine and see the tall Mr. Tire sign outside, it’s easy to think that tires are the only business conducted at this Farmers Ranchers Co-op location. You’d be wrong. While it’s true that we handle a wide variety of tire brands (Cooper, Hankook, Mastercraft, Firestone®, Goodyear®, Mitas, and BKT) and a range of tire services (repair, rotating, wheel alignment, and on-farm tractor tire service), we provide so much more.

First, let’s talk tires. It’s important to know that the price of tires, for the first time in a long time, has been dropping some. If you’ve been holding off on a tire purchase, it might be a good time to get what you need. Second, our Valentine location now has the Hunter Hawkeye Elite® wheel alignment equipment—the same featured at our Ainsworth Mr. Tire. This equipment is state of the art and allows us to provide precise alignment on your cars and pickups—and do it quickly. Our man on the machine is Mike Brinda—and he’s got years of experience that backs up our service. In fact, our Mr. Tire location averages two to three alignments each day.

**Fast and reputable automotive repair**

That experience extends into our light automotive repair services. Need a new water or fuel pump? We can do it. How about work on alternators, starters, and brakes? We’ve got you covered. Our staff handles additional services including oil changes and recharging air conditioning systems. There is lots of competition in the tire and car repair business, but you can count on Mr. Tire Valentine to offer fast and thorough service from a staff that brings years of knowledge and experience to the task.

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**Minerals Boost Calving Success**

By Rocky Sheehan, Feed Division Manager, tsheehan@frcoop.com

As we prepare for spring calving season, keep in mind the importance of minerals. Utilizing a well-balanced mineral program in your herd will help reduce problems including retained placentas. It will strengthen your calves’ immunity to scours, pneumonia, and other illnesses, reduce the impact of stress, and enhance fertility.

You can be assured that Farmers Ranchers Cooperative’s line of mineral products exceeds the National Research Committee on Animal Nutrition requirements. Our minerals are formulated to help you optimize the potential genetics in your herd.

The Chelated Breeder mineral is our leading brand formulated to optimize calving, lactating, and rebreeding. Powered by Alltech, Chelated Breeder mineral uses Bioplex®—organic (chelated) forms of key trace minerals that are more readily absorbed, utilized, and retained in the body. The use of Bioplex provides superior sources of zinc, copper, cobalt, and manganese—all of which support animal development, bone formation, hoof health, and the immune system.

We’re also proud to be using Bio-Mos®, another Alltech product. Gastrointestinal (GI) health and integrity is essential for animal performance. Bio-Mos feeds the GI tract and plays a critical role in animal nutrition and production. It keeps your calves healthy and reduces scours. Research shows that Bio-Mos contributes to efficient nutrient transfer from cow to calf. Farmers Ranchers Co-op has Chelated Breeder mineral with Bio-Mos in stock. We can also add Bio-Mos to any other mineral of your choice.

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**Check on our oil booking specials.**

Through May 31, buy two tons of Farmers Ranchers mineral and receive a free coat. Contact our stores or salespeople to find out more.
Justin Nelson is a familiar face in Farmers Ranchers Co-op territory. This Ainsworth native began working at the cooperative’s Agronomy Division in 2001 as a floater operator, handling a variety of responsibilities over the next decade. In January 2012, Justin left to pursue other opportunities in agronomy. He returned this past December, becoming the new Agronomy Division manager upon Kenny Eggers’ retirement.

It’s a position, he says, that will keep him close to an industry he loves. “I grew up on a hobby ranch just outside of Ainsworth, and worked on an area farm throughout high school,” explains Justin. “I like farming, but starting up a farm of your own today isn’t going to happen. This position lets me have a direct role in our customers’ farms without technically farming myself.”

A graduate of Northeast Community College in Norfolk with a diesel tech degree, Justin is comfortable with the Agronomy Division’s equipment, as well as its mission. “I believe in focusing on customer service—being available for our customers,” says Justin, who says a big part of that mission is to have a committed and knowledgeable staff, the right equipment that’s well maintained, and the products, services, and technology that will meet the customers’ needs in today’s quickly changing industry.

He’s also ready for the challenges. “Right now we’re dealing with volatility in the market, high input costs, and dropping corn prices,” says the new manager, who adds that making smart buys in that environment will be critical to the bottom line of the co-op and its members.

While he’s definitely sitting in a different chair than when he sat behind the steering wheel of a floater, he says he’s confident that the experience he’s accumulated over the years operating different equipment and handling a variety of responsibilities will serve him well as manager. “I’ve had the opportunity to get to know our customers,” says Justin. “It certainly is an advantage.”

Understanding the equipment, and what it takes to operate them effectively is also a bonus, he adds. “You can take that knowledge you’ve acquired and pass it on to our applicators today.”

Justin can also talk shop at home. His wife, Katie, works part time as an agronomist for a crop consulting firm. More than likely, though, their conversations around the dinner table will focus on their six-year-old daughter and two-year-old son. Justin hopes his new position will still allow them to get to area lakes during the summer for the occasional boating and camping getaway.

Right now, Justin says he’s concentrating on his new responsibilities and is thankful for this opportunity. “It’s great to have worked up the ladder and I’m glad to have a chance to serve our area farmers. Your agronomy team will strive to do the best job possible for our customers.”

Agronomy Manager Justin Nelson stands atop Farmers Ranchers Co-op’s new John Deere 4040 sprayer. With a 120’ boom, it will handle more acres in less time. It’s one of the improvements in the co-op’s agronomy arsenal this year. Coming in March will be a dry post air machine that should provide more accurate placement of dry fertilizer. And construction on the new dry fertilizer plant is expected to begin this summer.
MEET OUR NEW AGRONOMY MANAGER

THE STORY BEGAN IN 1993. In that year, Kenny Eggers left his position as Brown County weed supervisor and climbed up into a dry fertilizer applicator for Farmers Ranchers Co-op. Those were the days when the co-op might sell 100 bags of seed a year and worked out of the old dry fertilizer plant.

Today, two decades later, and as Eggers gets ready for his retirement party, he reflects on a career that took him from equipment operator to sales, and, in 2007, moved him into the interim manager and then Agronomy Division manager positions. It’s been quite a ride for Eggers, who grew up 15 miles northwest of Ainsworth. He’s witnessed the construction of the current bulk fertilizer plant in 1999 and the start of seed treatment. Under his management, Farmers Ranchers Co-op partnered with WinField Solutions on an Ainsworth Answer Plot®, and watched the new 70’ x 150’ seed warehouse take shape—a warehouse made necessary by seed sales that reached the $2 million mark last year. He also helped plan the new dry fertilizer plant to be completed later this year.

It’s been a busy 21 years, and working at the same place all that time makes for difficult habits to break. “I’m still getting up at 6 or 6:30 each morning,” says the retiring manager, who remains on call when new Agronomy Manager Justin Nelson has a question. But instead of heading into the Agronomy Center west of Ainsworth, he now has a cup of coffee in the morning and plans one of several projects that are consuming his time these days. He might help out his wife, Jackie, with the couple’s business—J’s Keggers, a liquor and bait store in Ainsworth. Or, he may supervise the construction of a new shed on the couple’s acreage east of town.

He’s investigating new possibilities, like purchasing a horse carriage to rent out for weddings and special occasions, or starting a new business cutting down cedar trees. There might be the occasional trip to visit his two sons, the couple’s two daughters, or the combined nine grandchildren scattered around Nebraska.

He’s enjoying the freedom, but admits that it’s hard to walk away from a job you love. “Will I miss it? Yes,” says Kenny unequivocally. “I built a lot of relationships with our customers over the years, and there are some of those relationships that will last a lifetime.”