

connections



inside:

- 4 New GM Believes in Our Strengths
- 7 Why the Plahts Chose Viafield
- 10 How to Battle Resistant Weeds
- 13 Our Rail Connection Keeps Us on Track

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Relationships That Define Us

By Chris Menke, Marketing Communications Director

Our new General Manager Chris Ludwig started his tenure at Viafield by building relationships with our team members. He set out to meet them, learn about their abilities and figure out what they need from this organization to do their jobs better. Relationships are the core of each of those jobs.

When you get right down to it, our cooperative exists because of its relationships. We're a network of connections between individual team members and the customers we serve. Those bonds are the way we discover what you need and then deliver on our promises.

This issue of our magazine brings you stories of how those relationships work. First, there is an introduction to Chris Ludwig on page 4. If you haven't already taken the first step toward your own relationship with him, here's a starting point that will give you a sense of his aspirations for Viafield.

On page 7, you'll meet Bobby Plaht, a livestock customer who definitely knows his own mind. Learn about how he formed a relationship with our Elgin location that has supported his cattle operation for nearly 30 years.

Agronomist Hope Cline builds relationships by sharing her knowledge. With a factual approach she tackles one of the thorniest problems in Iowa fields—herbicide resistance. Find her insights on page 10.

We rely on relationships with customers to provide grain that fills trucks and rail cars leaving our locations. Viafield makes a pact with you when we accept your grain. To fulfill that promise, we need strong connections with a team of dedicated marketing and transportation professionals. Meet Amy Homan on page 13. Our relationship with her and the Iowa Northern Railway serves all of us well. ●



New General Manager Is Confident: “We Have All the Ingredients for Success”

When General Manager Chris Ludwig took the reins at Viafield in February, he accepted the kind of challenge he loves.

“I immediately saw a financially strong organization with a talented and dedicated team,” Chris says. “These are the ingredients I know will lead to growth. I’m ready to align all the necessary factors that will help us meet our mission and achieve our objectives.”

The Viafield Chris envisions will be a leader in providing innovative products and services with a goal of achieving maximum potential for customers. “Delivering on our mission at the farm gate calls for encouraging talented

“I’m learning from our people and getting their ideas for improvements, steps that will make this a better organization.”

team members. The co-op’s role is providing customers the resources necessary to succeed and giving team members every advantage so they can become your trusted advisors.”

Though it’s too early to say what specific methods Chris will use to equip our staff, he’s beginning with conversations. “I’m making sure I get out and visit with the team members at every location,” Chris reports. “It’s important for the general manager to

be visible. I’m learning from our people and getting their ideas for improvements, steps that will make this a better organization.”

Chris is passionate about the experience team members provide our customers. But he wants to ensure that efficiency never crowds out safety. “With every change we implement, we must make certain our team members go home the way they came to work. For that reason, we’ll continuously focus on improving safety practices.”

Chris stresses that a safe work environment benefits co-op shareholders, too. He says, “As a customer, you need to be safe on our property. And, as an owner, you should know you’re supporting safe practices.”

Join the conversation with Chris

Also, in his first 100 days, Chris plans to meet with customers and get constructive feedback. He hopes you’ll talk with him about the positives. How can the cooperative build on current essential services? According to Chris, “We need to leverage current skills and assets in ways that fulfill our customers’ needs.”

Chris also points out that Viafield’s balance sheet is strong—giving us financial fuel to grow the cooperative. “There’s a lot to do and I believe our team is ready for the challenge. We’re building an organization that team members will be excited to be a part of and one customers want to work with. We’re ready to make our owners proud!” ●



Talking progress with team members in small groups was Chris Ludwig's first objective.



New GM Brings His Own Strong List of Ingredients

During the general manager interview process, the Viafield board of directors was impressed with the wealth of grain business knowledge Chris Ludwig brings with him. Here are some highlights:

- Chris earned his bachelor's degree in economics, management, marketing and sales from Purdue University in 1993.
- After graduation, he joined Continental Grain Company as a merchant trader.
- In 1999, he moved to Cargill, Inc. as a product line manager and spent nearly ten years with the Minneapolis grain giant.
- Then, in mid-2010 Chris became an international business unit manager for Brazil with The Scoular Company.
- Most recently he served as Director of Business Development Services with Land O'Lakes, Inc.

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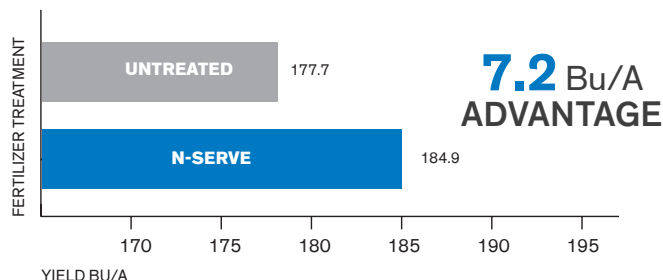


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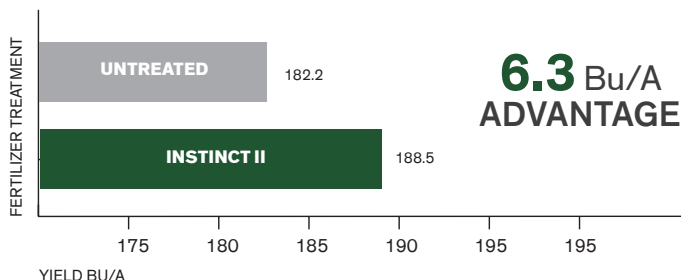
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He Makes His Own Choices

When Robert (Bobby) Plaht tells you he chooses to work with the Viafield Feed Division, you should know he's not saying it because his feed representative is there beside him. Bobby Plaht makes up his own mind.

Here's a story he only agrees to tell because his wife, Connie, believes it explains so

much about him. Back in his days as a high school football player, Bobby was recruited by a major university. Elements of the offer bothered him ethically. So rather than grab for the brass ring that would have appealed to so many young men, he decided to stay on the family dairy farm near Luana.

(continued on next page)



It's rare to find Bobby Plaht indoors. If he's not feeding cattle or working at his off-farm job, he's gardening. And it's never too soon for Bobby to start planning his garden. Connie sometimes wonders whether he plans to grow enough sweet corn for the whole county!

(continued from page 7)

His dad was unwell at the time, yet still prepared for Bobby to determine his own future. "Dad asked if I wanted to go to college or farm. I told him I'd stay, but I didn't want to milk cows anymore. I wanted to raise beef cattle," Bobby explains.

Bobby started farming in 1988. Today, he and Connie have feeders and a small cow/calf herd. He loves it—even the tasks some farmers don't prefer. "I like to haul manure. It's fun for me!" insists Bobby.

Raising cattle isn't the only Plaht enterprise. They also raise corn and hay, and do custom baling. Off the farm, Bobby works as a sow-unit breeding manager for a VMC operation near Williamsburg. He's been in charge of 3,250 sows for the past eight years.

Connie, a craftsman with Classic Bells in rural Postville, carries her love of rural decor items into the farmhouse Bobby's parents, Marlin and Donna, bought in 1963.



From day one, Bobby's feed has come from the co-op in Elgin. "Dad bought there, and I've stayed with them through all the upgrades," says Bobby. "They're friendly and the service is good!"

Bobby buys feeders out of Tennessee—thin, green-frame steers—and feeds them the traditional Steak Maker program that has been effective from a health standpoint. "Starting calves on it makes it easier for me to identify a sick one," Bobby explains.

"Bobby's good at that," Connie adds. "He's very dedicated to the livestock. And he's also pretty dedicated to his garden. If I lose track of him in a store, he'll be in the seed section!"

"Well, it's important to have potatoes to go with beef," jokes Bobby, sounding as if he made up his mind about that a long time ago. ●

Since 1988, the Plahts have been raising beef on feed from the Elgin location.



Does Your Herbicide Program Need a Chemistry Lesson?

Consider multiple herbicide modes of action

By Hope Cline, Agronomist, Clermont

Resistant weeds mean you can no longer expect just one herbicide to do the job. That's why the key to any effective herbicide program is using "multiple modes of action." I suspect you've heard that terminology from your agronomist often, but what exactly does it mean?

A herbicide's mode of action is how it interrupts a weed's normal growth and causes that weed to die. For example, atrazine disrupts photosynthesis which ultimately destroys cell membranes. There are currently nine different modes of action available to farmers.

Some chemicals, such as a glyphosate or a glufosinate, will only kill established weeds but don't offer any soil activity. Other chemicals,

like acetochlor, are active in the ground and prevent seedling weeds from emerging. Stressing weeds by using multiple methods to kill as many as possible is the best practice for managing resistance.

In Iowa, there are currently three known weed species with resistance to one or more herbicide modes of action: waterhemp, marestail (horseweed) and giant ragweed. Even if you aren't seeing herbicide resistance in your fields yet, start managing for resistance now to keep your fields clean.

It is absolutely critical to implement herbicide programs with multiple modes of action that will prevent, or at least delay, herbicide resistance. And whatever your program, using the prescribed rates and the proper adjuvants





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in your chemical program will also improve herbicide effectiveness.

We frequently recommend a pre-plant or pre-emerge application for corn and soybeans—one that not only burns down existing weeds, but also leaves a residual in the soil to prevent new weeds from germinating while the crop gets its start. A second pass that kills the next stand of weeds will also position additional residual in the soil to tackle late-emerging weeds. That type of program often includes up to five different herbicide modes of action.

Of course, there is no single right mode of action for every farm operation. Your Viafield agronomist will help you identify weed issues in your fields and select the best program for your specific situation. ●



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We're Well Connected Up and Down the Line Thanks to Iowa Northern Railway



Grain car shortages, delayed train arrivals and high freight costs... you've seen those news stories but, as a Viafield customer you never had to identify with the crisis. At your local elevator, cars arrive on time and prices reflect reasonable transportation rates. Are we just luckier?

Yes, in fact, Viafield customers are very fortunate to be served by four outlets on the Iowa Northern Railway. Our relationship with IANR, a family-owned and operated line created by a Manly native, gives us the uncommon ability to request and receive rail cars all in the same day. Plenty of grain sellers would like to be us, moving grain globally without the logjams.

Amy Homan, our contact at IANR, is one reason the relationship works so well. "I never want our rail customers to feel like captives. We understand they can choose to move their products another way. It's something every

Iowa Northern employee understands: All we have to sell is service and our reputation. If we say we're going to do something, we have to do it!"

The carrier accounts for a relatively small number of miles of track and, fortunately, most run past our Viafield locations. Amy lists the connections. "We're a railroad from Manly through Waterloo to Cedar Rapids with a branch from Waterloo to Oelwein and another from Forest City to Belmond. For Viafield we load at Manly, Marble Rock, Rockford and Oelwein. We're small and nimble; we can run lean."

The line that employs 110 people was started 20 years ago by Dan Sabin, who grew up rooted in the rail industry. "His dad's and grandpa's careers inspired him to purchase a dilapidated line with one working engine and turn it into something new," says Amy. "We run 23 locomotives and own 435 grain cars.

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(continued from page 13)

We deliver to ADM, to the Flint Hills Resources ethanol locations at Fairbank and Shell Rock, and to Cargill corn and bean plants in Cedar Rapids. We work independently with each of those receivers to prove we can add value to their operations, too."

Yet there are times—this fall was a prime example—when processors can't accept all the grain you produce. "As we all know, this year's bean harvest in our area was very, very good. The markets offered incentives to swiftly move more soybeans than nearby processors could use day-to-day. That's where IANR proves its flexibility, taking trains to Waterloo and transferring cars to the Canadian National Railway (CN). The CN runs to the Gulf where those Iowa soybeans are loaded into vessels for Asian countries."

Setting rates for traffic is one important facet of Amy's job that impacts the whole supply chain. "I need to offer a rate that lets everyone in the chain cover costs and succeed. I try to be respectful of everyone's position—farmers, elevators and processors. If the IANR makes money it's because everyone connected in the chain is making money." ●



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New Machinery?

Think About Getting the Total Package



By Mike Kuboushek,
Energy Leader



If you purchased machinery—new or used—to start your 2016 crop year, it makes sense to protect your investment. You do all you can by using the best lubricants, but did you know we offer an additional level of coverage?

The Cenex®Total Protection Plan™ warranty is available through Viafield for customers who use Cenex lubricants exclusively. Everyone connected with those lubricants believes you're assuring long life for your equipment when you use them. Add the warranty and you'll be guaranteed peace of mind about your biggest investments.

For a reasonable sign-up fee you can attach the Total Protection Plan warranty to new equipment for up to ten years, and for up to eight years on used equipment. The requirements are pretty straightforward:

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- Perform regular maintenance using Cenex lubricants. Be sure to retain proof of purchase for lubricants.
- Submit a used fluid sample or drain your fluids in keeping with the warranty provisions. In return, you'll receive a lube-scan report and suggestions for timely maintenance.
- Avoid actions that void coverage (misuse of the equipment or using non-Cenex lubes) as spelled out in the agreement.
- Relax. You're covered!

There's no deductible and the enrollment fee is minimal. We're offering you one of the few warranty plans that covers both new and used equipment. Cenex will pay costs of replacing engine parts, injection pumps, injector mechanical parts and more that fail during normal use—including installation and labor.

Ask your Viafield energy sales specialist for more information about the Total Protection Warranty Plan and how to apply for it. ●



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Our new general manager sees all the ingredients for a great cooperative. Learn more about his goals on **page 4**.

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