

SPRING 2017



connections



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Editorial Team

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RANDALIA WELCOMES

Jake Rechkemmer

Jake Rechkemmer is the newest face at Viafield's Randalia location. He started Monday, February 27th as Randalia's location leader.

Before coming to Viafield, Jake worked as Dunkerton Coop's agronomy manager. Jake was glad to see a position open with Viafield, cutting down on his daily commute.

"Just a new career opportunity, closer to home," he said. "I live in Oelwein, I grew up between the Fairbank rock quarry and the Oelwein airport."

Jake was raised on a farm and has held agricultural positions his entire life.

"I'm going to be 41 and I grew up on a farm and ever since I have been 20 years old I have worked in agriculture," he said.

Despite having plenty of experience to help Viafield's members and producers, Jake acknowledges being Randalia's location leader will have its challenges.

"Learning a new territory, learning the new people, just learning the workings of a different company," he listed as some of the bigger challenges in his new position.

However, these challenges also excite Jake about being the Randalia location leader.

"Helping the new (fertilizer) plant get up and running, meeting new people, working for a larger organization," he said of what he is most looking forward to in his new career.

Besides working for Viafield, Jake will continue to operate his own personal farm with his wife Amy, as well as raise their three children: Owen (13), Lane (11) and Aubree (6).

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We are Committed to Success

by Chris Ludwig, CEO

Every day at Viafield we have committed ourselves to a simple mission, to be the full-service provider of choice, enhancing the success of our customers, employees and communities. When you choose Viafield for your farming needs, you gain access to one of the most talented teams of people in the industry who are dedicated to your success. We are also investing in that mission with industry leading assets and technology. In today's challenging environment you need a committed partner you can grow with and trust for the long term.

In this issue we are highlighting a few areas that demonstrate our commitment to you and our communities. We recently

completed a strategic plan to refresh our entire fleet of application equipment with the most advanced technology available in the market today. Not only does this benefit our members directly through reliable service and precise application, it is projected to result in substantial savings in the coming years which benefits members.

We have also completed our new dry fertilizer and seed treatment facilities in Randalia, Iowa. This \$6.8 million investment was completed in just 8 months, within budget, and will support member's growing needs well into the future. This state of the art facility includes a number of new innovations enhancing our infield performance as well as the safety of our team members.



How do we know we are achieving our mission? Measurable growth. Our number of customers, tons, bushels, gallons, and crop protection volumes are all showing increases this year vs last year in a challenging market. This growth is fueling our ability to reinvest in our business and our communities. This wouldn't happen without our talented team committed to one mission – enhancing your success.

This busy spring season, please take a moment to reach out and say "thank you" to one of our dedicated team members who you feel is demonstrating commitment to your success. At Viafield, we are committed!

OUR VISION: Serve as the trusted advisor for the customer of the future through our talented team by delivering products, services, technology, and innovation, ensuring their profitability and ours.

Spring is in the Air...



New Equipment is in the Field.

Spring can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. For those in agriculture, however, spring typically means: go time.

For many, this time of year translates to extended time inside machinery making passes across Iowa's enriched soil. Having dependable equipment with the latest technology is critical to getting the job done and increasing production yields.

Improving reliability and accuracy is exactly what Viafield will accomplish this spring with their brand new fleet of equipment. The existing fleet had more than served its time and many units had gone beyond their useful life. After close evaluation of Viafield's machinery, CEO Chris Ludwig discovered the equipment was aging and was not doing it gracefully.

"We had some machines that were as old as the mid-90s," Ludwig said. "The average age of our fleet was 10 years old and needed to be addressed."

Another problem with the fleet was a lack of uniformity. When no two pieces of equipment are the same, it's difficult to set and adhere to standard operating procedures. "Having the same equipment across the entire area will allow applicators from any location to assist with operations anywhere. This will make the busy spring season much easier," said Northwood Location Leader Barnes Toresdahl.

This spring age related malfunctions and problems occurring from transitioning between different pieces of equipment will be a thing of the past. Viafield has worked with Ziegler and AgChem to provide Viafield's locations with state of the art equipment.

"We're projected to save a half million dollars over the next five years."

Not only will time be saved from fewer breakdowns, but money as well. Ludwig and Viafield Agronomy Leader Bob Camp calculated the repairs and maintenance of Viafield's existing fleet to total over \$400,000 per year.

"That's a price of a new machine every year," Ludwig said.

By buying in quantity, Viafield was able to substantial volume discounts and give its members access to the best equipment and technology in the industry. The five-year plan and extended warranty from Ziegler and AgChem will give Viafield the opportunity to ensure their equipment doesn't age past the point of practicality and usefulness.

According to Ludwig, updating the entire fleet was not a decision that was made lightly.

"We didn't just come at this like 'let's liquidate the fleet,'" he said. "We put together a team to study it thoroughly and found that through the (new deal) we're projected to save a half million dollars over the next five years." This innovative approach to provide modern equipment to benefit members is the largest equipment contract by an Iowa cooperative. "Leveraging purchasing volume to enhance local savings for our members is a key objective of the cooperative model."

Analyzing the existing equipment and what the new equipment would allow Viafield to accomplish was a six month project. After evaluating proposals from all 3 major equipment suppliers,

the contract with Ziegler for brand new AgChem machinery with top of the line technology was the best option to update Viafield's outdated fleet.

Ludwig and Camp also reviewed more efficient ways to use the available equipment. According to Camp, Viafield will dispatch equipment from three agronomy centers. Each center will then be able to assign equipment to different areas, better covering Viafield's territory.

Equipment has already arrived at many of the agronomy centers and is patiently waiting for "go time."



Viafield Team Races To Feed Others

Many people would agree grocery shopping is not a leisure activity. The object is: get in, get what is on the list, resist the temptation to impulse buy, place your bet on the fastest cashier and get the goods home. Although the goal is to not waste too much time, literally running around the store is rarely ever considered. Viafield Human Resources Team Member Jeanette Mulcahy and Marketing Communications Director Chris Menke put their grocery speed shopping skills to the test.

For two years now, Viafield has participated in the Cerro Gordo Farm Bureau's "Grab and Give" event. The "Grab and Give" event is the fastest food drive in the area with over \$6,000 worth of goods collected in six minutes.

Area businesses and their participating teams are divided into heats and given a shopping list. Everything put into their cart would then be donated to the Hawkeye Harvest Food Bank.

Like all sports, there are rules. For this particular shopping race, competitors had to stick to the list and the budget.

"You had to get as close to \$250 as you could," Mulcahy said. "You got two



minutes to run around and get your stuff and get in a checkout lane." It wasn't as easy as racking up the dollars on their phones or scratching out a total along the side of the grocery list. Mulcahy and Menke had to keep a mental tally of everything they put into their cart. Simple addition was made more complicated as the timer ticked off the seconds.

Adrenaline began to pour through Mulcahy and Menke as they waited for their heat. There was not much use in strategizing; grocery list restrictions made it so they couldn't fill the cart up with items that would add up quickly. The plan to heavily stock up on coffee was against the rules.

Not only were they prevented from loading up on the big stuff, they were also limited on their access to the good deals. The first heat had a clear advantage with first dibs on two-for-one or five-for-five deals.

"I can't imagine what the third heat went through because there was nothing left," Mulcahy said. Of course, like all competitive athletes, Mulcahy was exaggerating. There was definitely more than "nothing left" as she and Menke had to strategically mound their cart to keep the goods from spilling over.

The buzzer rang. Their two minutes were over. Time may have been up, but

it was in no way time to relax. Shopping came to an end and final judgement began: it was time to check out.

The cashier started scanning the items. The total flashed up on the monitor, inching closer to their \$250 budget. As the cashier slid the groceries across the scanner, Mulcahy and Menke were desperately trying to add up the remaining items in their cart to see if they stayed on budget.

The conveyor filled with groceries as the cart emptied. Green beans, corn and peas rolled across the belt. At last the cart was empty. Fruit, tuna – final total \$252.97. While \$2.97 is a far cry from a blown budget it wasn't quite enough to earn Viafield first place. One can of fruit and a can of tuna pushed Viafield into second place. The winners were off by a mere .20 cents.

It wasn't a grocery-speed-shopping victory, but Mulcahy and Menke definitely felt a sense of pride. It was reward enough knowing the Hawkeye Harvest Food Bank benefited from the day's event.

"It's a feel good thing and it's nice to see as Viafield we can participate and support those in need. It's not just about agriculture, it's about giving back... I'd do it again in a heartbeat," Mulcahy said.

"It's not just about agriculture, it's about giving back."

– *Jeanette Mulcahy*

Chris Menke and Jeanette Mulcahy getting ready to race.



New Fertilizer Plant is Ready for Spring!



team studied all of the possibilities and choices available to them in replacing the existing fertilizer plant, one thing was unanimous: they would not cut corners.

"With the expense of this, we wanted to make sure we did this right," Camp said. Nothing but the best would qualify for the new fertilizer plant.

As the building began to grow up from its foundation, the precision in which every detail was considered became visible. Even those with little to no construction or agricultural background can appreciate the level of quality poured into the building.

"If you were to step inside this fertilizer shed and looked at all the boards, you'd wonder how many trees went into this building," Camp said.

Of course, those who have a better understanding of a fertilizer plant's operation are even more impressed with the new structure. Nothing was spared to ensure only the best technology was used inside the new plant. More than a building, the new plant is a work of art. A structure so unlike any other, it has become a marvel others are traveling to see.

"This is the most modern fertilizer shed in the area," Camp said. "The building and equipment companies we chose for this project will be bringing people around to showcase it. They will be using it as a demo."



Bob Camp
Agronomy Team Leader

Extra activity has been noticed around Viafield's Randalia location. For the past few months, members and passersby have watched as a building unlike any other emerged from the ground. What they were witnessing was the birth of a state-of-the-art fertilizer plant and seed shed.

The fertilizer plant in Clermont had served its time and desperately needed to be retired. According to Viafield Agronomy Team Leader Bob Camp, the Clermont plant was not only old and worn out, but it was starting to fail and become unsafe. Only so many repairs can be made before it becomes more economical to build new.

Brainstorming for a better, safer, option began this August. As Camp and his

Inside the plant are new technological designs, including a structure affectionately referred to as the 'Stairway to Heaven.' This stairway is a set of stainless steel stairs that reach to the top of a 135-foot tower. This will make servicing the tower not only easier, but safer.

Included on the list of new designs unique to this plant, is the horizontal blender. It allows for quicker and more thorough blending. This is critical for delivering product in the busy season. The entire process is kept running smoothly with advanced automation using the latest technology.

Another factor Camp and his team took into consideration when designing the ideal fertilizer plant was increased storage. The plant will have more storage space allowing Viafield to become more competitive in their fertilizer offerings. Viafield now has the ability to stock up on fertilizer when market prices are more favorable. This savings will in turn be passed onto Viafield's members. When the markets change Viafield will be able to give more competitive offers.

The completion of the Randalia fertilizer plant and seed shed was timed out so it could begin servicing Viafield's members this spring season.



Randalia

By the Numbers

10,300 TONS

Dry Storage Capacity

250 TONS

Holding Tower

25 TONS IN 6 MINUTES

Load Out Speed

18,000 BUSHELS

Seed Storage Tanks

4 TON

Horizontal Mixer

PROTECT YOUR EQUIPMENT, PERFORM REGULAR MAINTENANCE



This day in age, there are a lot of exciting things happening in agriculture. Whether it's new seed modifications, the latest advancements in technology or changes in fertilizers, there are so many new things for operators to learn. None of this is operational without the exciting topics of fuel and oil.

"Fuel and oil are one of those industry standards," Viafield's Energy Sales Specialist Matt Katcher said. "(They) don't seem like they change much."

Most people have one main concern about their fuel: do I have a full tank? Even more frequently neglected are hydraulic oils. Either a piece of equipment is due for an oil change, or it isn't, and if it doesn't need to be changed it is filed away in the back of the mind.

Katcher along with fellow Energy Sales Specialist Mason Kleitsch and Viafield's Energy Team Leader Mike Kuboushek wanted to change the way people think about fuel and oil and its effect on machinery.



Presenters from CHS -- Mike Crane, District Manager of CHS lubricant groups in Des Moines and Tony Emerson, CHS refined fuels account representative of Sioux City -- were invited to speak at four energy meetings hosted in early March. Knowing that fuel and oil are far more exciting than most give them credit, Viafield's team members asked Crane and Emerson to focus on those areas.

"We told them broadly what to speak about then...gave them the reigns to create their own presentation," Kleitsch said.

Crane caught everyone's attention when he began talking about changes in machinery cost. A transmission for a quadtrac tractor once cost around \$20,000, now the price is closer to \$70,000. Thanks to the Total Protection Plan (TPP) we offer, CHS wrote a check to a customer in need of a new transmission. He avoided paying for the costly repair himself.

Crane recommended operators conduct a lube scan report. He compared it to a blood test -- a lube scan report can tell the operator a lot about the well-being of the equipment.

A new light was also shown on diesel fuels. As new stipulations are put into place regarding diesel standards, people are noticing performance differences in their equipment.

"It's not necessarily their fuel quality, but a revisiting of teaching customers how to take care of their diesel fuel," Katcher said.

The energy meetings talked about how changes in fuel standards also require changes in fuel maintenance.

According to Kleitsch, the energy meetings were by far a success.

"They went very good," Kleitsch said. "(Operators) stuck around and talked with me, talked with each other, they were talking about the meeting."

The goal was to get Viafield's members thinking and talking about their fuel and oil more regularly than just when problems occur or when routine maintenance is necessary. Those who want to do more for their fuel and oil should contact Matt Katcher or Mason Kleitsch. They will happily share their expertise about fuel and oil.

"Fuel and oil are one of those industry standards that don't seem like they change much, but they can make a huge difference in your operations."

– Matt Katcher





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It's Time To Order Your 2018 Calendars

You should have already received this year's ordering postcard for 2018 calendars. Please return this postcard to your nearest Viafield location by May 26 or order on-line at www.viafield.com/calendar.



**This Year's
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Contest ends on May 31, 2017.
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Viafield Northwood Team Member Darlene Wilkes presents our first \$200 Visa Gift Card winner, Doug Tempus, with his prize.