Building on the Legacy

With one year in the books, your cooperative celebrated our unification of Viafield with Member Appreciation Dinners where the annual report and dividend checks were handed out to members.

November 18, 19 - During two member appreciation dinners, customers reflected on Viafield’s first year and learned about their cooperative’s many accomplishments during this first year of operation. Just under 800 guests showed up for the two-day event where your cooperative had an opportunity to say thank you for their business and give some patronage back in return. The annual report theme “Building on the Legacy” was a fitting title for our cooperative’s rich tradition. To be more specific, we were the first cooperative in Iowa (Rockford Cooperative Exchange, 1891). But building on the legacy is much more than the rich tradition that started with our former cooperatives. It’s about what we do next.

Before we take the next step into year two please take one last look back at the highlights of 2011 from each business. Behind these highlights lies an inspiring story that began over 100 years ago when dedicated, hard working people invested their meager earnings and their precious time into building a dream. They embraced the cooperative spirit and forged a path for their successors to follow. Today, we celebrate that dynamic history and look forward to building on the legacy.

Article continued on page 2.
Agronomy

Since last September the agronomy team has been introduced to new equipment, technology and facilities that will allow us to serve our customers and members more efficiently. In Marble Rock we built a new state-of-the-art UAN liquid fertilizer facility. This facility allows for storage of one million gallons of 10/34/00, half million gallons of thiosulfate and two million gallons of 32 percent. The facility also features three load out bays, one of which will be available 24 hours a day and seven days a week. In addition to our liquid facility, Viafield is a leader in wholesale and retail dry fertilizer, which is processed at our terminal in Marble Rock.

Energy

One year into the unification of Viafield, the energy team has worked hard to provide safe, reliable service to our customers.

We added a 5,000 gallon bobtail truck to our propane delivery fleet. We used this truck to increase efficiency and reduce delivery costs to our customers in the Sumner, Maynard and Arlington areas.

We have expanded our energy sales and service territory by branching out into the northwest area offering propane, refined fuels and lubes for our Carpenter, Grafton, London, Manly, Myrtle and Northwood locations. That area had not previously offered those energy services. Along with improving efficiency, our team is working with each customer to find an energy plan that fits their needs.

The energy team has been focused on safety, investing in updating our propane bullets at Elgin and Arlington to meet new regulations for 2011 to ensure the safety of our team members and customers.

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Welcoming Members to the Diamond Jo Casino - Dubuque

Investments in equipment have also been an important highlight in 2011. Viafield purchased two combo units (fertilizer application/liquid application) and expanded to eight new liquid semi tankers to service our liquid units in busy seasons. Expansions in facilities and equipment help our team become more efficient, but we also value education for our team and customers.

Answer Plot® meetings were held company-wide to bring our customers the latest information about plant strategies from Winfield Solutions and Viafield representatives. Agronomic updates held in January featured speakers from Iowa State University and Bayer Crop Sciences on fertilizer applications. Our Agronomy College, held during the growing season at Arlington, helped customers keep abreast of physiological plant changes and developments, as well as the impacts of external events, such as weather and pests.

Like the other businesses within Viafield, the agronomy team has become more specialized with the addition of a Seed Sales Specialist, and we will be hiring someone to lead precision ag products and services for our team and our producers.
Feed
Viafield’s feed division has been focused on efficiency, capacity and safety during our inaugural year. At the end of our fiscal year our four mills manufactured about 650 tons of livestock feed per day, primarily for swine, dairy, beef, broilers, layers and turkeys. Changes at our Rudd mill enabled us to increase production close to 150 tons of feed. We’ve also added a new bulk liquid molasses system at Rudd. In February, we installed a new pelleter at Elgin that doubled our pelleting capacity.

On August 9, we broke ground for a mill expansion at Elgin that will be completed by spring 2012. With the expansion, our manufacturing capacity at Elgin will nearly double to over 1,000 tons per day. By expanding the Elgin mill, we will be able to continue to meet the needs of our customers as their operations grow. Feed Business Team Leader Bill Hayes, says, “We’re in it for the long haul and plan to serve all of our customers’ needs far into the future. We’re investing in our feed mill, because we believe in the future of the livestock industry.”

As part of its commitment to food safety and feed quality, Viafield’s Elgin feed mill has attained Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification. Safe feed is essential for safe food, and HACCP is used to identify those potential food safety hazards, so that we can take the appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate any concerns in the feed we make. Our Elgin feed mill is our first facility to implement the HACCP system, and we will be evaluating when we will implement it at our other facilities in our commitment to producing safe, quality feed products for our producers.

Grain
Combined storage space was an obvious advantage for Viafield from day one. Your cooperative now has a total capacity for nearly 26 million bushels of grain, access to four railroads and the Mississippi River. This has increased our ability to move large amounts of bushels throughout the year and proved especially important during harvest season. Although we are still in the early stages of this new organization, Viafield has had the ability to reach into several new markets in the Mississippi Gulf, the Pacific Northwest, the East Coast and Canada this past year. Improvements at our grain facilities and great teamwork improved efficiency companywide, a savings we can pass on to customers. An example of efficiency was seen when your cooperative was able to move 200,000 bushels of soybeans to make storage space for producers at our Sumner location during harvest.

The rail load expansion project at our Marble Rock location has enabled us to load 30 rail cars in about six hours, using a USDA certified scale that is extremely accurate and saves time. To meet rail standards at our Rudd location, new siding was added on the Canadian Pacific Railroad right of way. At our Maynard location a new grain leg and receiving pit was upgraded from 2,500 bushels an hour to 8,000.

2011 saw Viafield assemble a team of grain originators. Grain Marketing Relationship Managers, as they are called, focus on working with producers to establish their needs, profit goals and risk management strategies for crops. Viafield partnered with FCStone, an international risk management organization, to bring producers exciting programs to mitigate risks in a volatile market.

Give the location a good look around and pick up. In the heat of the season, things get scattered and left where last used, so a good pick up and clean up will get things up off the ground and put away before covered with snow. Yes, it won’t be long before we are pushing and piling snow off the lots, so plan now where you will pile snow to avoid obstructing driver’s views both in the lots and on the streets.

Slips, falls, frostbite, frosted over windshields, ah, ’tis the season. We all have been through this before, so take the necessary precautions:

Dress for the occasion, slow down and watch your step making deliveries on ice covered and hard packed lots and yards and allow your vehicle to warm up and clear the glass. Have fun and enjoy the winter wonderland.

Minute with Mike - Safety Committee Update

Hopefully when this article reaches you the fall season is winding down. On my part, it’s been a long hard ride and I am almost looking forward to freeze up. With that in mind there are a few things to attend to before the snowballs start flying.

Article by Mike Katcher
Viafield Named Presenting Sponsor at 2011 Ag Expo

December 6, 7 - The Cedar River Complex in Osage, Iowa will set the stage for the 2011 Ag Expo. This new building is 10,874 square feet and can accommodate more than 700 guests.

The expo is being spearheaded by Three Eagles Communications in Mason City. Three Eagles owns many local media outlets such as AM 1300 KGLO, and 93.9 FM the Country Moose. Both stations are out of Mason City.

What does this event mean for Viafield? Viafield has been named the presenting sponsor. The cooperative will be included in all of the advertising and promotions for this event. A 10x20 booth will be set up at the expo for our team to showcase our products and talented people.

It will be a chance to meet some new faces and create awareness about our company. With the larger building, we will be able to show some of our specialized equipment - both inside and outside the complex.

The expo will shine a spotlight on agriculture in northern Iowa and southern Minnesota and will give patrons a chance to see new strategies and equipment used for agriculture in the area. This event is FREE to the public and will feature a FREE lunch both days.

Viafield should be well represented at this event with our sales team working during the two days, which runs from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday and 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Wednesday. If you would like more information on the Cedar Valley Complex, visit their website at:

http://www.cedarrivercomplex.com/

Cedar River Complex, Osage

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Turn problems inside out

Some problems require fresh, innovative thinking. One way to search for creative solutions is to remember the acronym SCAMPER:

- **Substitute.** Replace an element that’s part of the problem. Use a different material, ingredient, or person and see what happens.
- **Combine.** Put elements together. For example, if you can’t decide whether to use one process or another, try mixing for improved efficiency.
- **Adapt.** Look outside the problem for something you can use to address it. Velcro was invented by someone who looked closely at how burrs stuck to clothing and adapted the principle.
- **Minimize or maximize.** Make something smaller or larger. Instead of targeting the mass market with a new product, for example, maybe you can find a small niche to sell it to. Conversely, maybe a specialized tool has wider potential.
- **Put things to a different purpose.** Look for a different application. Instead of an entrée, maybe what you’ve cooked could be an appetizer or dessert.
- **Eliminate.** Look for elements you don’t need. Often we include steps in a process out of habit, for example, whether they still serve the original purpose or not.
- **Rearrange.** Put the elements in a different order or reverse them completely. You spot what’s missing more easily in a new arrangement.
Kristine Wilberding - Office Customer Service
Rudd, Iowa

Kristine Wilberding, new to Viafield’s Rudd location is anything but ordinary. Originally from Winnebago, Minnesota, Kristine went to high school in the Blue Earth area. What’s unique about Kristine’s story is what she did after high school; she moved with her sister/band mate to Ithaca, New York, to pursue a music career with their rock band Weep. Kristine, who played bass guitar with the group, recorded two CDs and played various venues in New York City. After playing with the band for nine years, Kristine decided that, although fun, the music industry was not for her, and moved back to the Midwest in 2002. In 2003 she met her husband, Luke Wilberding, and they moved to Charles City and bought a house. Before starting part-time this fall with Viafield, Kristine worked for Kmart as a human resources manager in Charles City. “I’ve learned a lot about farming in my months already working here and I enjoy working with our customers.” Kristine started working full-time for Viafield in early November.

Scott Girdler - Agronomy Account Relationship Manager
Randalia, Iowa

As an agronomist, Scott Girdler will work with growers in the Randalia area to help them develop profitable seed plans, forecast fertilizer needs and implement proactive chemical tactics to produce a healthy and profitable crop. Scott brings experience in precision ag and agriculture sales to Viafield from Heartland Co-op and L&M Precision Ag, Inc. Originally from Knoxville, Iowa, in 2002 Scott earned a bachelor’s degree from Iowa State University in hotel restaurant and institution management. Scott resides in West Union, Iowa, and is an avid golfer and tennis player.

Upcoming Events

December 6, 2011 - Ag Expo - Cedar River Complex Osage, Iowa - 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. (Viafield Presents Guest Speaker Doug Prohaska 11:00 a.m.

December 7, 2011 - Ag Expo - Cedar River Complex Osage, Iowa - 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

December 13, 2011 - Customer Service Committee Meeting - Conference Call Fuze Meeting - 9:00 a.m.

December 14, 2011 - Location Leader Meeting - 9:00 a.m. @ Charles City, The Sleep Inn Motel

January 18, 2012 - Official Annual Meeting @ North Iowa Area Community College Center
Have you ever wondered why, when people keep saying that we live in ‘an age of communication’, we continue to have so many problems communicating effectively in the workplace?

Managers, supervisors and employees alike repeatedly say that they never get enough information - that no one ever tells them anything - or that they are always the last to find out when changes that affect them are happening in the organization. A key factor that emerges from studies of successful managers is that they have a regular and meaningful communication process with their staff.

But we already have a company bulletin to tell everyone what is happening
Many companies have internal newsletters, newspapers or company bulletins but these written communications cannot be an adequate substitute for managers communicating directly with employees. This is especially because written communication is all one-way. Developing two-way communication can involve management presentations, meetings, consultative committees, discussion groups, attitude surveys or training needs analyses.

Making a start
One way for you to start to improve your communication is to assess your communication skills. The skills supporting good communication include knowing what medium to use (small group meetings, one-to-one discussions, meetings of all employees, etc.), what information to communicate, how to assess the climate for communication, what obstacles there are likely to be and much more.

Maybe I need some training?
While training can help, it is not the whole answer nor should it be the first step. It is also important that you: plan for what is to be communicated, how and when it is to be done; evaluate what has been done before so that you can build on past successes (and avoid past pitfalls); monitor your communication strategy to ensure it meets your objectives; and are flexible and adapt your approach in the light of experience.

Making it work
There is no fail-safe prescription to improve communication and give guaranteed results, but here are some principles that will give your communication strategy a much greater chance of success:

Establish the need for each communication
The reasons for the communication, what you are going to communicate and what you expect to gain from it must be clearly understood.

Develop the skills and awareness
Invest time and effort to improve your skills – even if you consider that they are already good.

Make it understandable
Make sure the information being communicated is clear to everyone. Communication efforts often fail because those presenting information do not make it relevant to the people for whom the information is intended.

Make sure it is two-way
One-way communication fails because those delivering the message do not always know whether it has been received or understood.

Communicate often
It may be a truism that management can never communicate enough, but communication efforts are often ineffective because managers give a message only once and assume it is understood.

Try different methods and styles
Different people absorb information in different ways, so it is necessary to present information in different ways. The approaches may include: spoken, written, in small groups, individually or using pictures and diagrams.

Monitor the effectiveness
Make sure that the messages you are communicating are getting through by including in your strategy an assessment of effectiveness.

Maintain the effort
A communication strategy that starts with a blaze of glory but soon lapses because of a lack of follow-up can do enormous damage to the credibility of future efforts.

If properly planned and delivered, communication will ensure that everyone understands what your goals are, what their part in achieving them is and what they can do to make sure that the goals are achieved. The time lost through lack of direction and misunderstandings will be dramatically reduced.

Article by Simon Osborne

Simon Osborne is a Director of Practical Workplace Strategies and helps organizations develop leadership skills, manage the process of change and link the skill development of people to business strategy, including through management and executive coaching.

Anne Benning - Human Resources Team Leader