

SOURCE

Spring 2026

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*Read how the FIELD Pro program through Heritage FS is helping to prepare the next generation of applicators on page 12.
Photo by Syda Schlickman, Heritage FS*

Serving the people of the GROWMARK System

GROWMARK

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Do you know an employee, program, or story that should be published in SOURCE? Do you have feedback on the magazine? Email story ideas, comments, or questions to SOURCE@growmark.com.

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The FS GRAIN and GROWMARK Construction teams review the blueprints for FS GRAIN's rail expansion project at its St. Anne facility. Barring any significant weather delays, the project will be completed by the fall of 2026 and ready to serve customers during harvest. FS GRAIN will add 1.2 million bushels of storage space and expand to shipping unit trains with access to the Union Pacific and CSX rail lines.

From left to right: Brian Hettel – FS GRAIN Operations Manager, Collin Graves – FS GRAIN General Manager, Rafael Delgado – GROWMARK Construction, Project Manager, Chris Coen – GROWMARK Construction, Site Manager, Bryan Rader – FS GRAIN Merchandising Manager

Building Capacity for What's Ahead

MESSAGE FROM GROWMARK CEO MARK ORR

Spring is a season farmers know well. It's when planning turns into action, and when the work put in during the off-season starts to matter. That same mindset applies across the GROWMARK System as we continue to invest in areas that will strengthen member businesses for the long term.

One of the most important steps we're taking is the expansion of our AgraForm facility in St. Louis. We announced in December that we're building a new, state-of-the-art biological crop input manufacturing plant on that site. AgraForm currently manufactures traditional insecticides and fungicides, and this new investment positions us to meet the production needs of a fast-growing market in agriculture.

Biologicals are becoming a bigger part of modern crop production. They help improve soil health, support nutrient efficiency, and offer additional tools to protect plants, all while giving farmers more options to manage their acres. Demand is growing faster than current

manufacturing capacity can support, and many companies in the industry don't have the facilities to produce these products at scale. This new plant gives GROWMARK the ability to fill that gap.



When the facility becomes operational in late 2027, it will manufacture biostimulants, biopesticides, and biofertilizers for customers across North America. It will also allow us to produce animal biologicals and waste-treatment

products, expanding the ways we can support our members and the broader ag economy, providing GROWMARK a stronger position at another key point in the ag value chain that benefits the entire System.

Farmers continue to look for reliable, effective tools to raise strong, healthy crops and achieve better returns on every acre. This investment ensures GROWMARK can deliver those tools, made in the United States, with the consistency and quality our members expect. The advancements happening in agricultural biologicals offer growers practical ways to strengthen plant health and soil performance.

Spring is always about preparing for what's ahead. This expansion is part of making sure our System is ready: ready to support members, ready to meet customer demand, and ready for the next era of crop production.

Mark Orr



Celebrating the Winners Behind the Performance

The 25th annual Winner's Circle awards highlight the top-achieving crop specialists in the field

Kayla West, GROWMARK, Agronomy Sales Program Associate, kwest@growmark.com

Recognizing employee accomplishments in the FS Seed System through the Winner's Circle event continues a strong GROWMARK tradition of celebrating excellence across our Seed System. This year, we gathered in cities across Canada and the United States, including Niagara-on-the-Lake, Washington, D.C., West Des Moines, Chicago, and St. Louis, to honor the crop specialists who delivered measurable growth and impact throughout the season.

Seller recognition is earned through a point-based system, with achievement levels of bronze, silver, gold, platinum, and the ultimate achievement, the diamond level. Each level reflects measurable performance, sustained growth, and a commitment to

advancing our seed brands in the marketplace.

While the metrics matter, the Winner's Circle is about more than results on a spreadsheet. It is about the people in the field building relationships, earning trust, and driving meaningful growth across our portfolio. Top performers had the opportunity to earn up to \$5,000, reinforcing our commitment to rewarding initiative, dedication, and competitive drive.

Performance was also highlighted within our FS InVISION and FS HiSOY brands, recognizing both year-over-year growth leaders and those driving total volume. This structure allows us to celebrate momentum builders alongside those expanding scale and market presence across the System.

Behind every high-performing crop specialist is a strong support system. The long days, travel, evening calls, and weekend plot visits require encouragement and partnership at home. We proudly celebrate the significant others and families whose support makes this level of performance possible.

Beyond the awards themselves, Winner's Circle strengthens relationships, aligns our teams, and deepens our shared commitment to excellence in seed selling. Performance is measured in numbers, but success is built through commitment, and Winner's Circle honors both as we continue to lead, grow, and win together.



USA WINNER'S CIRCLE Achievers

DIAMOND

Brandon Van Osdel
Matt Allen
Michael Ellis
Jared Marckmann
Billy Johnson
Aaron Koss
Trevor Andrews
Larry Atkinson
Daniel Miller
Smith Sexton
Billy Beckham

PLATINUM

Pat Herbst
Kurt Wilke
Ben Bruck
Brenton Dalton
Jason Hamer
Matt Campbell
Todd Wibben
Chad Greene
Lane Welsh
Tyler Smith
Dan Schaller
Lynn Compton
Samuel Van Buren
Ben Kratzer
Casey Byrd
Caleb Smithson

GOLD

Brian Schoon
Danny Deany
Gary Brandt
Kevin Miessner
Matt Probst
Adam Rahe
Cole Lush
TJ Renfrow
Neil McCubbin
Scott Helm
Joe Terando

Corey Hackman
Justin Scheibe
Pat Prasalowicz
Alic Mohni
Chad Kuhlmann
Matt Boston
Ben Harris
Zach Collins
Darian Norville
Max Stinebaker
Brice Seigfreid
Kolton Beville
Brant Privia

Brendan Marshall
Craig Gerdes
Joe Mortimer
Adam Kryder
Jim Webb
Zach Sauerbrunn
Brian Frank
Noah Green
John Wyss
Pat Roach
Luke Shively
Randy Hurez
Reagan Newell
Jared Bergmann
Ryan Allen
Derek Williams
Ryan Brennecke
Josh Pickel

Greg Guest
Russell Brock
Alyssa Nelson
Kevin Powell
Tom Heese
Jeremy Stock
Tyler Voss
Shawn Lenius
Michael Thompson
Justin Leinberger
Joey Malinowski
Todd Livengood
Andy Heacock

Matt Thomas
Ryan Wilhelm
Lance Murphy
Brad Lake
Trevor Warner
Ryan Snider
Bryce Parsons
Matt O'Leary
Rick Klevze
William Alan Ward
Ron Reynolds
Doug Lowry
Mike Lemmon

Lane Steinke
Logan Gast
Warren Kearns
Michael Morgan
Rick Hatz
Austin Norris
Chris King
Shannon Chenoweth
Bill Kurtz
Dustin Adcock
Brenden Bohnenstiehl
Austin Ufkes
Brad Meyers
Chad McMahon
Jeff Rollinger
TJ Hendricks
Seth Kopplin
Dennis Ross
Jason Monro
Alex Van Hise
Michael Weidner
James Lurkins
Lynn Adams
Zack Lefevre
Jamie Anderson

SILVER

Travis Rust
Todd Zimmerlein
Karl Fasse
Elmer Jenkins

Bryan Frogue
Zach Jansen
Bryce Hill
Jake Fesler
Mark Myers
Brett Reese
Mike Welch
Greg Connor
Lori Koeller
David Gaitley
Travis Johnson
Jon Loitz
Ron Koebele
Tony Reed
Cody Gibson
Greg Lisota
Whitney Baker-Wilson
Stephen Smith
Cortney Thomas
Jason Henry
Zach Merfeld
Phil Ruble
Scott Burge
Kirk Zinkievich
Casey McAlpine
Tim Bennett
Jason Bird
Darin Boudreau
Luke Martin
Aaron Rieman
Justin Wassmann
Dave Rieman
Jason Gettings
Travis Rudat
Jensen Langer
Brent Pruett
Hunter Sickles
Jeff Kinsella
Justin Obert
Reece Settles
Kolton Myrvold
Cris Torman
Jeff Glade
David Johnson

Lane Steinke
Logan Gast
Warren Kearns
Michael Morgan
Rick Hatz
Austin Norris
Chris King
Shannon Chenoweth
Bill Kurtz
Dustin Adcock
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Seth Kopplin
Dennis Ross
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Alex Van Hise
Michael Weidner
James Lurkins
Lynn Adams
Zack Lefevre
Jamie Anderson

Luke Brenizer
Mike Manship
Trace Dunton
Justin Dambacher
Bradley Griffith
Tristan Brock-Jones
Jacob Johnson
Craig Laudeman
Ryan Bridson
Matthew Colbrook
Ryan Anderson
Brad Comstock
Pete Lowry
Scott Dedert
Ryan Behnen
Ramsey Hoss
Alex Beaver
Travis Cook
Matt Harrington
Nathan Johnson
Scott Woodhouse
David Gray
Lee West
Ron Wettstein
Charles Miller
Jason Lee
Andrew Katcher
Jake Kaiser
Ross Barker
Tim Broge
Mikayla Caygill
Kyle Vosburgh

BRONZE

Bryan Bailey
Tom Loida
Ty Hewing
Tyler Reichmann
Alex Canada
Alex Norris
Mitch Bremer
Liberty Vollmer
Gage Glotzbach
Trevor Olson

Seth Scarcliff
Cassidy Myrvold
Brady Burg
Nathan Thompson
Jesup Muhlbauer
Will Bushert
Stacy Nansteel
Taylor Roberts
Jeff Mekley
Derek Sharer
Wallace Loewen
Curtis Goeke
Kyle Betenbender
Jeff Neuheisel
Robby Dittmer
Jesse Harman
Jamie Eilts
Matt Frankenbach
Travis Handy
Tim Petty
Andy Kays
John Canalle
Austin Keller
Calvin Deetz
Tom Badgley
Faron Reynolds
Jeremy Gibson
Sam Hilgerson
Justin Grace
Ron Meyer
Louis Wyatt
Caleb Hart
Kyle Hogrefe
Cory Sprung
Rick Schwennen
Mitch Lahr
Jeff Loyd
Jordan Heit
Shane Smart
Tegan Carson
Chad Otwell
Shae Bray



Chuck Spencer, pictured left, receives the Excellence in Advocacy Award from ARA President & CEO Daren Coppock



From left to right, Keith Lawson – GROWMARK, Chuck Spencer – GROWMARK, Sara VanSoelen – New Century FS, Molly Blickensderfer – GROWMARK, Jordan Floarke – GROWMARK, Daniel Miller – Southern States Cooperative, and Steve Becraft – Southern States Cooperative

GROWMARK System Celebrates Rising Stars

The GROWMARK System celebrates four rising stars and an Excellence in Advocacy Award

GROWMARK Staff

The GROWMARK System celebrated four employees named in the Agricultural Retailers Association's (ARA) annual Rising Stars list. ARA recognizes top performers and emerging leaders each year at its annual conference. GROWMARK celebrates these leaders for their recognition on the 2025 Rising Stars list.

- **Daniel Miller** - Southern States Cooperative
- **Jordan Floarke** - GROWMARK
- **Molly Blickensderfer** - GROWMARK
- **Sara VanSoelen** - New Century FS

To be considered for the annual list, ARA member companies nominate their brightest emerging leaders, and nominees create videos sharing their unique stories. Once selected, the rising stars participate in a variety of development and networking events to

build their networks and sharpen their leadership skills.

Brad Drake, GROWMARK Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, says the awards reflect the caliber of GROWMARK System employees. "We're proud of the accomplishments of these young men and women and are excited to see what their futures hold," he said. "Their dedication and leadership skills in the field of agriculture will help ensure a strong and stable future for the organizations, customers, and farmers they serve."

GROWMARK's Chuck Spencer was also honored with the 2025 ARA Excellence in Advocacy Award, which "recognizes outstanding leadership and commitment to advancing sound public policy on behalf of the agriculture retail industry."

ARA leaders said the following about Chuck receiving the award in their news release:

"Spencer has been a driving force in ARA's advocacy efforts through his service on both the Public Policy and Government Relations Committees over the years. His expertise and dedication have made him an invaluable contributor to ARA's policy development and engagement work."

"In addition to his policy leadership, Spencer has played a key role in organizing congressional facility visits across multiple states, giving lawmakers firsthand insight into the essential work agricultural retailers perform to support America's farmers and the rural economy."

GROWMARK is proud to be recognized for the standout achievements and contributions of its employees to the North American agriculture industry. To learn more about the Agricultural Retailers Association, visit ARADC.org.

GROWMARK to Build New Ag Biologicals Plant in St. Louis, Missouri

The new plant will produce biological crop inputs for ag companies

Sabrina Burkiewicz, GROWMARK External Communications Manager,
sburkiewicz@growmark.com

As the demand for biological products across the spectrum of agriculture continues to grow, GROWMARK plans to construct a state-of-the-art biological crop input manufacturing facility at the site of its St. Louis, Missouri-based AgraForm facility that produces and packages insecticides, fungicides, and biological products for agricultural use. GROWMARK acquired AgraForm in 2024.

The new biologicals plant will focus on manufacturing biological crop inputs for agricultural companies that either do not have their own production facilities or require additional access to production facilities. The plant will also be capable of manufacturing animal biological and waste treatment products.

Agricultural biologicals are crop inputs derived from living organisms or natural substances used to protect plants or enhance plant growth and soil health. They can be used in lieu of or alongside synthetic crop inputs and production products to support plant health, control pests, or improve nutrient efficiency. The St. Louis facility is expected to be operational in late 2027 and will produce biostimulants, biopesticides, and biofertilizers.

"The scientific advancements in agricultural biologicals have introduced innovative methods for farmers to safeguard their plants and improve soil health with more sustainable options," said Rod Wells, GROWMARK's Senior Vice President of Strategy and Logistics. "It's beneficial for both farmers and consumers when we enable farmers to grow healthier and stronger crops using these sustainable practices."

Global demand for biological manufacturing is also growing faster than the industry can supply, and although many companies have developed products, current manufacturing facility capacity has not kept pace. "As demand for biological products continues to grow across the ag industry, the construction of the new manufacturing plant will allow GROWMARK to provide high-quality biological products, made in the United States, to stakeholders throughout North America," said GROWMARK Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Brad Drake. "It also allows GROWMARK to influence another critical point in the ag value chain to better serve its members and customers."





The Cooperative Leadership Conference Brings GROWMARK System Leaders Together

The conference focused on development and honored the achievements of System leaders

GROWMARK Staff

GROWMARK System leaders gathered at the Cooperative Leadership Conference in January to celebrate their achievements and the organizations they lead. Attendees heard from motivational speakers and industry experts from organizations such as the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, the National Grain and Feed Association, and others. Speaker Kyle Scheele taught listeners to become idea factories and innovation machines; Dr. Kate Darling gave the audience a deep dive into the future of human-robot interaction; and Molly Fletcher taught listeners to develop a Dynamic Drive, comprised of their mindsets, energy, curiosity, resilience, and boldness.

The most anticipated portion of the conference was the awards ceremony, which recognized the outstanding contributions of System leaders and the organizations they lead. Two retiring general managers, who gave decades of service to the GROWMARK System, were also honored for their special contributions: Carl Tebbe, retiring from Gateway FS, and Jim Milleville, retiring from TriCounty FS.

Highlights of the awards ceremony included FS GRAIN winning the first CORE Score Champion Award and



both Sunrise FS and County Farm Centre winning FS Digital Experience Awards.

The Chairman's Award, a recognition that has not been earned since 2012, and which honors exceptional overall performance and leadership within the FS System, was also presented to both Gateway FS and Prairieland FS.

The Cooperative Leadership Conference was a time for GROWMARK System leaders to gather, learn, and grow. GROWMARK looks forward to honoring System leaders and their achievements at the 2027 conference.



Carl Tebbe Retires from Gateway FS

From the dairy farm to 37 successful years in the System, Carl offers his advice

Sabrina Burkiewicz, GROWMARK External Communications Manager, sburkiewicz@growmark.com

Carl Tebbe spent his youth milking cows at home with his dad in Clinton County, Illinois. When the farm crisis of the 1980s struck, his dad said he was crazy if he wanted to stay home and milk cows for the rest of his life. With that piece of advice, Carl headed off to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where he earned a bachelor's degree in accountancy and his CPA.

Carl started his career in the FS System in 1989 with the IAAA auditing association. 37 years later, he's looking back on a fruitful career and is thankful for his dad's wise advice. Carl has spent time in many different parts of the System; in 1991, he became controller at Macoupin Service Company, and then in 1999, he became general manager at St. Clair Service Company. In 2002, Carl became General Manager at AgriPride FS and later, through a



2011 merger, became the Gateway FS General Manager.

Carl says he's most proud of the financial growth they've fostered within the company and of his team's development. "I'm proud of empowering my team to take

chances," he said. "I supported them to take risks, and it's been beneficial for us to grow as a company."

Carl said he would be excited if he were 25 again because of the bright future he sees ahead for the company. "There are a lot of good things coming for our FS System. At times in my career, I heard feedback that we can't compete, but here we are 30 years later, and we are stronger than ever today," he said.

Carl encourages new employees to work hard to enjoy the rewards of a great company: "To take advantage of training, work hard, listen to what people are saying, and have some crucial conversations," he said. "Our System is very good, and young, talented people are going to be rewarded going forward. Just work hard, and you'll get there."

“ Our System is very good, and young, talented people are going to be rewarded going forward. Just work hard, and you'll get there. ”

-Carl Tebbe, General Manager of Gateway FS

Planting the Seed: Applicator Apprenticeship Takes Root at Community College

The FIELD Pro apprenticeship is preparing students for successful careers in ag

GROWMARK Staff

When GROWMARK Regional Business Manager Josh Wurmnest started his Aspiring Leaders leadership program, he never imagined his class project would bring an existing idea to life and lead to the creation of an apprenticeship for community college students.

Wurmnest and Caity Heap, an FS Agronomy Recruiting and Education Specialist at Heritage FS, were both on the Parkland Community College advisory board and realized the school’s traditional two-year, classroom-based model didn’t always fit the realities of ag retail with its seasonal demands, fast-paced operations, and the needs of working operators.

Seeing an opportunity to strengthen the existing program, it became the focus of Wurmnest’s Aspiring Leaders project while Heap coordinated the development of the FIELD Pro course at the college alongside Heritage’s Agronomy Manager, Jason Wesslund, and Area Manager, Dennis Gass, who brought the hands-on agronomy operation experience. Together, they helped carry the idea from concept to classroom.

The FIELD Pro apprenticeship focuses on fertilizer, inputs, equipment, logistics, and development – the core skills operators need to do their jobs safely and well. The initial

program pilot at Heritage FS includes 16 operators from across the territory, giving participants the chance to learn alongside peers in similar roles. Training combines everyday work at local plants with three in-person sessions covering communication, customer service, safety, compliance, equipment, spraying, anhydrous ammonia, troubleshooting, and technology. For operators in the pilot program, FIELD Pro means more than training; it’s recognition.

While the pilot program is underway, GROWMARK, Heritage FS, and Parkland are already

working together to expand it to additional FS member companies and their local community college partners. By sharing curriculum, partners, and standards, FIELD Pro can be replicated across locations while tailored to meet specific local needs.

The program is the only State of Illinois-registered agricultural apprenticeship that recognizes the value operators bring to the field every day. “Unlike traditional training

programs, FIELD Pro blends regulatory requirements with the realities of seasonal ag retail work, offering flexibility without lowering standards,” said Amiee Densmore, Parkland Apprenticeship Coordinator.

“FIELD Pro proves that when we invest in our people with intention, collaboration, and respect, we don’t just fill roles – we elevate a

profession,” Heap said. “As labor challenges continue, FIELD Pro offers a practical, people-focused solution, building the future of agriculture one operator and one acre at a time.”



Preparation begins in the classroom



And continues in the field



The first class of applicator students in the program





Jim Milleville Retires After 38 Years in the GROWMARK System

Mentoring and mentors played an important role in his career

GROWMARK Staff

Jim Milleville grew up farming with his dad and uncle, but it wasn't long before he found his way into an internship at the Twin County Service Company in 1985. Jim says he wanted to work for the GROWMARK System because he felt they would be a stable employer that would be around for a long time. He also understood that the pension would be a valuable benefit when he retired. After he finished college, he was able to join full-time as an energy specialist.

As he advanced in his career and grew in his knowledge of the co-op he worked for, he was promoted to energy sales manager at Lakeland FS in 1992 and to marketing manager at Lakeland FS in 1995.

Jim later moved into a sales manager position with Corn Belt FS in 1999 and was promoted to his first General Manager position at the St. Clair Service Company – something he was proud to achieve, and 18 years later, he moved to Tri County FS as General Manager.



Jim says it's the people that he enjoyed the most throughout his career. "I always enjoyed getting to know people in the interview process and hiring them when I knew they were going to do well," he said. "Mentoring them after they come on and helping them advance through their career was equally rewarding."

Mentors also played an important role in his own career, leading him to embrace mentoring others who

are just starting. "Leo Steward got me started in manager training, and Tom Buenker gave me my first opportunity to interview as a general manager," Jim said.

One of the accomplishments that holds a special place in his mind is the work he did at St. Clair Service Company to stabilize the organization for both employees and the company. "I was able to negotiate the decertification of the union at St. Clair, and that really helped everybody and ensured the company would be around for a long time to come," he said.

His advice for those just starting their careers in the System? "Always bring value to your employer and your customers," Jim said. "Make sure they'll have a very hard time replacing you, and always treat the company like you own it."



“Always bring value to your employer and your customers.”

-Jim Milleville, General Manager of Tri County FS

Dyersville, Iowa: Where Family, Farming, and Dreams Collide

Three Rivers FS's Adam Rahe shares the keys to his success as a successful crop specialist

Sabrina Burkiewicz, GROWMARK, External Communications Manager, sburkiewicz@growmark.com

When Adam Rahe spotted the FS logo on a booth at a career fair at Iowa State University, he recognized it because his dad was a liquid fuel and LP customer. Little did he know that visiting the booth that day would lead to a 24-year career with Three Rivers FS in Dyersville, Iowa.

Today, Adam farms with his brothers in the fields around the famous "Field of Dreams" in Dyersville, while also working as a highly respected certified crop specialist at Three Rivers FS. His training and his experience as a farmer have helped Adam develop a reputation as a trusted agronomic resource in his community and among his customers.

"GROWMARK Agronomy has always provided localized training on current agronomy issues and has been critical to help us stay on top of the issues and changing nutrient and agronomy cycles," he said. "When we hire new employees, their eyes are opened, and they realize what a big deal it is to have the GROWMARK Agronomy training and access to the best people in the industry."

Being honest with his customers and having difficult conversations at times has also fostered loyalty and earned him new customers over time. "I tell my customers, my job isn't to tell you what you want to hear, my job is to help you

make money," Rahe said. "Sometimes those conversations are hard, but that goes back to my training, like GROWMARK's Crucial Conversations, which teaches you how to have those difficult conversations in constructive ways."

Technology also helps give him an edge over the competition in the field. "Using our data to maximize efficiencies, minimize product shortages, and evaluate product performance helps our customers get the most out of their time and money," he said. "Utilizing all of our tools and platforms helps us be on top of our game at all times, build trust and earn the loyalty of our customers," he said.

Being a farmer as well as a crop specialist gives Adam some unique insights and experience that is hard to replace. The different aspects and experiences of farming that include maintaining equipment, setting a planter, mixing herbicides, spraying, and harvesting have made Adam a better agronomist. Having in-field, hands-on experience with products and hybrids also helps set him apart from the competition.

Adam's story at Three Rivers FS wouldn't be complete without mentioning the fact that the actual

corn field, made famous by the movie "The Field of Dreams," is located in his community. What's even more incredible is that Adam and his brothers were approached in 2013 to farm the corn fields around the Field of Dreams. The magic became even more fantastic when, in 2021, the Chicago White Sox and New York Yankees played a game on a new Major League Baseball field constructed next to the original, with actor Kevin Costner, who starred in the movie, throwing out the first pitch. You can watch the two teams re-create the famous scene of players emerging from the field and admire the Rahe brothers' beautiful corn by scanning the QR code.



Adam's advice to those just starting their careers as crop specialists is to earn the certification and go the extra mile. "Your potential is unlimited, and what makes you different comes from inside. Be willing to go the extra mile, study as hard as you can, read up on the next topic, and be good at what you do," he said. "The GROWMARK System provides unlimited opportunities, and it's just a matter of what you choose to do."



Adam, pictured center, and his brothers pose for a photo on the Field of Dreams surrounded by the corn they grew together

POLICY APPLICATORS

Connor Kaeb, GROWMARK, Associate Manager, Government Relations, ckaeb@growmark.com

THE FS SYSTEM CONNECTED
WITH THE POLICY WORLD



Chuck Lippstreu discusses issues with the state legislators

GAPS FS Hosts Key Michigan Legislative Leaders for Facility Tour

Engaging with elected officials creates awareness about agriculture

GAPS FS, a division of Evergreen FS, recently welcomed Michigan Senate Majority Floor Leader Sam Singh and House Agriculture Committee Chairman Jerry Neyer for a tour of their Middleton, Michigan, facility. The visit provided an opportunity for state lawmakers to gain a firsthand look at the operational capabilities of GAPS FS and the essential services it provides to farmers across the region. Michigan Agri-Business Association President Chuck Lippstreu also joined the visit, adding an important industry perspective to the day's discussions.

Michael Boettger, Regional Operations Manager, outlined the company's role in supporting crop production, agronomic decision-making, and the technical expertise underpinning efficient on-farm services.

In addition to the facility tour, the group discussed several pressing legislative and regulatory issues impacting Michigan's agricultural workforce and supply chain. Topics included allowing 18 to 20-year-old commercial drivers to obtain a hazardous materials endorsement for intrastate commerce—an effort aimed at addressing critical labor shortages while maintaining safety standards. Participants also reviewed a proposal to expand the restricted farm service CDL window from 180 days to 210 days, providing agribusinesses with greater flexibility during peak seasonal demands.

Another key issue discussed was the importance of protecting farmers' continued access to neonicotinoid pesticides and seed treatments, which remain an essential tool for many crop protection programs.

The visit highlighted the thoughtful contributions of both the facility team and participating policymakers, reinforcing the importance of continued dialogue on the issues that influence Michigan's agricultural landscape.



Left to right: Chuck Lippstreu, Michigan Agri-Business Association; Michael Boettger, GAPS FS; Representative Jerry Neyer; Senator Sam Singh; Connor Kaeb, GROWMARK



Thomas Call from MID-CO Commodities provided an update



GROWMARK's Don McLean hosted the conference



Midwest Co-op's Luke Hartung provides crop nutrient data during the conference



Great Lakes Grain's Sustainability Specialists Melyse Renwick and Aiden Davies

Ontario Winter Conferences Focused on Innovation and Collaboration

February was a busy month in Ontario for staff and growers

Corinna Ward, GROWMARK and Juli Paladino, Central Ontario FS

Agronomy professionals and member co-operatives from across Ontario met in London in February for the FS Ontario Agronomy Conference—an annual event dedicated to sharing knowledge, exploring emerging trends, and strengthening collaboration across the province's agricultural network.

Hosted by the Ontario Region Agronomy Sales and Marketing Director, Don McLean, the conference featured an impressive lineup of expert speakers from both industry and the GROWMARK System. Sessions covered a wide range of topics, from the future of farming to practical strategies for improving crop management.

A special thank-you goes to Cory Weber from Central Ontario FS and Alex Vsetula from AGRIS Co-op, who shared detailed insights about how they use the myFS Agronomy app to enhance customer engagement and service.

Attendees also received valuable updates on market dynamics and production challenges, with presentations focused on grain markets, fertilizer trends, edible bean production, biologicals, soil nutrient management, and emerging crop diseases. Weed resistance and new modes of action were recurring themes, highlighting the ongoing field challenges many growers face across Ontario.

GROWMARK's Jeff Bunting delivered an engaging crop protection update—despite competing with the Canada vs. Czechia Olympic hockey game. The group may have paused briefly to catch Canada's exciting overtime win.

In addition to technical education, the conference placed strong emphasis on storytelling, communication, and the power of partnership among FS member co-ops. Networking events, receptions, and informal discussions offered opportunities to

share experiences and strengthen relationships across regions.

Overall, the 2026 FS Ontario Agronomy Conference successfully combined innovative learning with community building, equipping agronomy teams with fresh insights and renewed momentum as they support growers through the upcoming crop year.

February was a busy month in Ontario as the Great Lakes Grain Winter meetings also began. The annual Great Lakes Grain winter grower meetings took place the first week of February across AGRIS Co-op and Central Ontario FS territories.

Guest speaker Thomas Call from MID-CO Commodities provided his latest global market outlook. The Great Lakes Grain team, local staff, and industry partners supported the meeting by providing timely news and information to attendees.





Marking 40 Years of Co-operative Leadership

Embracing change and being a champion of progress was his path to success in the System

Ontario FS Staff

After a career of dedicated service, leadership, and innovation, Kelly Boyle's retirement marks the close of a 40-year career in the co-operative system—a journey that began in 1985 and left a lasting mark on every organization and person he's worked with.

Kelly's career began as a Management Trainee with United Cooperatives of Ontario (UCO) in 1985. Less than a year later, he was managing the UCO branch in Fergus, Ontario, already demonstrating the leadership and commitment that would define his career. In 1988, he took on the role of General Manager at Warkworth Co-op, later expanding his responsibilities to include managing Madoc Co-op from 2001 to 2003.

In 2003, Kelly relocated to Clifford, Ontario, to become the General Manager of North Wellington Co-op. His leadership continued to grow, and in April 2019, he took on the additional responsibility of leading Huron Bay Co-op. When the two co-operatives amalgamated in September 2022 to form Midwest Co-op, Kelly was instrumental in guiding the transition—

his leadership and deep understanding of co-operative values contributed to a well-managed and successful integration.

Throughout his career, Kelly embraced change and championed progress. From the days of handwriting weekly feed price lists to implementing modern efficiencies, he has seen and led the evolution of the co-operative system. But beyond systems and structures, it's the people who mattered most to him. Kelly found joy in the variety of each day, in building relationships with customers, and in mentoring staff, watching them grow and succeed.

As he steps into retirement, Kelly looks forward to spending more time with his family, especially his grandchildren, getting his hands dirty in the garden and catching up on some reading.

Kelly's legacy is one of dedication, transformation, and impact. He leaves behind a strong imprint within the co-operative community. Thank you Kelly for 40 incredible years. You've made a difference and you'll be greatly missed.



Connecting with Municipalities Creates System Showcase

New facilities help connect local officials to the FS System in Ontario

Juli Paladino, Marketing & Communications Manager, Central Ontario FS

The Central Ontario FS Alliston team recently hosted the County of Simcoe and guests of the Municipal Agriculture Economic Development and Planning Forum, organized by the Ministry of Rural Affairs.

Over 50 municipal planners and engineers from across Ontario took time to tour the new Alliston facility. Branch manager Dennis Smith commented, "This was a great opportunity to not only showcase our facility and what it can offer, but also

have great conversations with planners to better understand our business and how we serve the ag community. Some of the attendees had a strong background in agriculture, but some did not."

Tour guides Dennis Smith, Mark Sawden, Emma Finch and Dave Van Casteren did a great job engaging their groups and really let Central Ontario FS shine!



Investing Back into the System: How the Stock Redemption Program is Powering Growth

Ag-Land FS is in constant motion thanks to its new AgChem facility

GROWMARK Staff

Across the GROWMARK System, the Stock Redemption Program continues to demonstrate the power of cooperative investment, returning dollars to member companies in ways that fuel sales growth, enhance operational efficiency, and strengthen service to customers. The scope of projects underway at Ag-Land FS illustrates how this program is being strategically deployed to modernize infrastructure, expand capacity, and support the System’s future.

Ag-Land’s use of the Stock Redemption Program supports the development of its new mega plant, which includes a fully automated dry fertilizer facility, an AgChem building, an office, a seed warehouse, and a shop. The AgChem building’s progress was accelerated by program funds, enabling them to realize benefits such as automation, improved operational efficiency, enhanced customer satisfaction, and earlier-than-projected sales growth.

The AgChem facility, constructed in the spring of 2025, is a two-bay building equipped with automated systems, including eight 30,000-gallon liquid fertilizer tanks, a 6,100-gallon N-Serve tank, a 12-tote mini bulk rack system, and twelve 5,100-gallon chemical tanks.

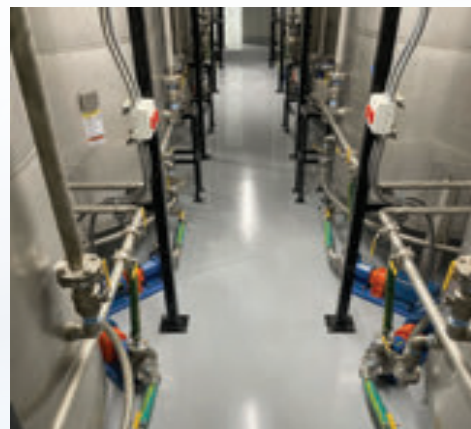
The new building’s enhanced speed and efficiency enable the Ag-Land team to deliver products more quickly and reliably, improving outcomes and strengthening customer service. For example, loading tender trucks takes approximately 66% less time than before, allowing trucks to return to the field more quickly and enabling

self-applied customers to receive their products without delay.

Reducing idle time during peak season is also critical for both cost control and equipment longevity. Every hour a sprayer sits, waiting for a load, increases operating costs and shortens the effective acre-life of the machine, which represents an investment of more than \$600,000. The same principle applies to tender trucks – when they are not moving, the cost per acre rises. The new AgChem facility significantly reduces these bottlenecks, keeping equipment in motion and enabling more acres to be covered each hour. This improved flow directly enhances logistics during the busy season and delivers measurable value back to patrons, one acre at a time.

The Stock Redemption Program allows member companies to reinvest returned dollars into assets that strengthen their businesses and support sales growth, whether through expanded storage, modernized equipment, or improved technologies. For Ag-Land FS, the program has accelerated projects that reinforce its value proposition, enhance safety and efficiency, and position it for continued growth.

These stories highlight what makes the cooperative system unique. When the System succeeds, its members succeed. And when members invest in their operations, the entire System becomes stronger.



Stephenson Service Company and Pearl City Elevator Shareholders Approve Agreement to Merge Cooperatives

Joining forces strengthens agronomic offerings for Stephenson County customers

Brooke Hass, Stephenson Service Company, Marketing Coordinator, bhass@stephensonfs.com

On January 30, shareholders of Stephenson Service Company and Pearl City Elevator approved an agreement to merge the two cooperatives. As of September 1, 2026, the merged cooperatives will use the Stephenson Service Company name.



The Pearl City Elevator has a rich heritage of serving farmers, homeowners, and businesses in Stephenson County, Illinois, for over a century. As a full-service agribusiness, Pearl City Elevator provides a comprehensive suite of goods and services, including agronomy, fertilizer, crop protection, seed, and custom agronomic advisory support. Its animal nutrition division, Alliance Animal Nutrition, manufactures and distributes high-quality feed to support livestock operations.

“We’re extremely excited about the future of our two cooperatives coming together as one,” said Kevin Keltner, Board President of Stephenson Service Company. “Our two cooperatives have a deeply rooted history and common ground in northwest Illinois, and

we’re looking forward to a future of elevated service to farmers and our communities.”

Stephenson Service Company General Manager Jay Kempel says the two cooperatives together bring more than two centuries of expertise, experience, and service to the area.

“Pearl City Elevator has been in business for 107 years. Stephenson Service Company has been in business for 95 years. That is an average of 100 years that the two cooperatives have served local farmers in northwest Illinois,” he said. “I think the decision by both boards of directors to merge the two successful cooperatives together sets up one very strong and successful company to serve the farmers in northwest Illinois for the next 100 years.”

Stephenson Service Company, a member cooperative of FS companies, is a leading agribusiness cooperative serving Jo Daviess and Stephenson counties in northern Illinois. Since 1930, Stephenson Service Company has provided customers with fuels, lubricants, propane, plant nutrients, crop protection, seed, structures, vehicle service, and grain marketing assistance. More information is available at www.stephensonfs.com.





Celebrating the International Year of the Woman Farmer

Agriculture isn't about gender; it's about dedication, knowledge, and commitment to the operation

Sabrina Burkiewicz, GROWMARK External Communications Manager, sburkiewicz@growmark.com

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has proclaimed 2026 as 'The International Year of the Woman Farmer.' The USDA's 2022 Census of Agriculture found that there are approximately 1.2 million female farmers in the United States and 33,927 of them can be found in Illinois.

There are many female farmers throughout the GROWMARK System, and Jessi Hintz is one of them. Hintz, a seed operation manager in GROWMARK's wholesale division and a farmer, has spent most of her life on a farm. Growing up on her family's farm and then bringing her spouse into her family farm operation means agriculture isn't just a job, it's a way of life.

Her career path off the farm began with a degree from Illinois State University, with a double major in agronomy management and agribusiness. She's been in the GROWMARK System for 12 years, but being a farmer after her day job means she doesn't just talk the talk; she walks the walk, bringing a unique farmer perspective to her role at GROWMARK.

"I make it a priority to be as involved as possible year-round. I'm fortunate that my husband and dad include me in key decision-making, especially when it comes to seed selection, where I take great pride in our FS brands," she said. "I also closely monitor the grain markets to help guide pricing decisions. Being involved in these areas not only strengthens our farm operation but also enhances my effectiveness in my day-to-day role at GROWMARK."

Hintz says that although farming is stressful, her family is lucky to have one another, and that it's also incredibly rewarding. "Farming is one of the most stressful and demanding careers you can have, but it is also one of the most rewarding," she said. "Spring planting and fall harvest are definitely the busiest and most challenging times. Those seasons bring long days, late nights, and weekends that look no different than weekdays.



There's a lot of pressure tied to weather, timing, and markets—many of which are completely out of our control."

Hintz also says shattering stereotypes as a female farmer is just part of the job. "There's often surprise when I'm the one running the combine on the weekends or when I was at the top of my agronomy classes with very few females in attendance," she said. "Growing up on our farm with my sister, our dad never treated us any differently. We were expected to work hard, learn every aspect of the operation, and understand the ins and outs of production agriculture."

Although she was no stranger to hard work and immersing herself in the

knowledge necessary to run the farm successfully, balancing her career, being a farmer, and being a mother to three young children presents no end to the challenges and complications of life.

"A lot of people ask how I find balance while raising small kids, contributing on the farm, and also having a career in agriculture. For us, balance doesn't always mean separating those roles—it often means blending them. We take our kids to the field with us whenever we can and make them part of the operation," she said. "Agriculture isn't just a job for us; it's our lifestyle. Involving them early is one of the greatest gifts we can give them because it teaches responsibility, work ethic, and an appreciation for the industry that supports our family."

When asked for advice to other young women farming and being moms while trying to grow their careers outside the farm, she says to be kind to yourself, and never be afraid to pursue your goals.

"Give yourself grace—there will be hectic seasons and long days—but don't be afraid to pursue both your professional goals and your role on the farm," she says. "You can build a career in agriculture, be an active partner in the operation, and raise a family rooted in strong values all at the same time."



CHOOSE SAFE

SAFETY & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Kevin Frye, GROWMARK, Safety & Environmental Services Consultant, kfrye@growmark.com

Being a Resource for Emergency Responders

Firefighters learn how to handle propane and anhydrous ammonia emergencies

Safety & Environmental Services recently conducted three training sessions for the Urbana Fire Department, covering all three firefighter shifts, to better equip them to respond to anhydrous ammonia and propane emergencies. The training was coordinated by Chad Baxley, a former GROWMARK employee who worked in Safety & Environmental Services and the Energy Department and is now a firefighter in Urbana, Illinois. Chad was aware of the in-depth safety training provided by GROWMARK, as well as the walkthrough safety trailer, and knew it would be a worthwhile exercise.

“I’m living my dream, this is what I was meant to do,” Chad explained about his current vocation. “Every day I go to work, there is an opportunity to help people and do good for the community.” Chad is also part of the Urbana Fire Department Hazardous Materials Committee, helping ensure firefighters

are educated and equipped to respond to such emergencies in the greater Champaign-Urbana area.

The training included an hour of classroom discussion covering chemical properties, protecting the community, equipment safety features, and emergency protocols, all while ensuring the well-being of the responders. The crew then became familiar with transport tankers by looking outside and walking inside the GROWMARK safety trailer. Manito Transit truck driver Brian Bell also assisted in one of the sessions by explaining specific parts and features of the tanker.

GROWMARK welcomes outreach opportunities for our emergency responders in the FS System and appreciates the partnerships we have with emergency responders throughout the Midwest and Ontario.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR RETIREES

Robert McCarthy GROWMARK FS LLC. 1 year	James Fruendt Heritage FS, Inc. 11 years	Michael Weaver South Central FS, Inc. 21 years	Curt Vacek Conserv FS, Inc. 33 years	Donald Olson Insight FS, Inc. 41 years
Robert Buse Evergreen FS, Inc. 2 years	Jim Christensen Heritage FS, Inc. 13 years	Jeffrey Brown Southern FS, Inc. 25 years	Robert Barker AgVantage FS 34 years	Tony Godar TriCounty FS, Inc. 44 years
Kevin Kavanaugh Heritage FS, Inc 4 years	Robin Dulin GROWMARK FS LLC. 5 years	15 Susan Bell New Century FS, Inc 16 years	25 William Bays Gateway FS, Inc 26 years	35 Carl Tebbe Gateway FS, Inc. 37 years
5 John Doyle New Century FS, Inc. 8 years	Wayne Hillman Haggerty Creek 17 years	Robert Scott Gold Star FS Inc 17 years	Joseph Fecht Heritage FS, Inc. 27 years	45 Steven Schwaegel St Clair Service Company 47 years
Barry Keller Gateway FS, Inc. 8 years	Robert Scott Gold Star FS Inc 17 years	Shelley Young South Central FS, Inc. 17 years	Tim Cook South Central FS, Inc. 28 years	James Milleville TriCounty FS, Inc. 38 years
Bryan Withrow Wabash Valley Service Company 10 years	Terry Walker Central Ontario FS 18 years	Joyce Barlow Central Commodity FS 19 years	Gregory Birchler Gateway FS, Inc 39 years	Gary Skaer St Clair Service Company 47 years
Steven Hellenbrand Insight FS, Inc. 10 years	Jack Landolt M&M Service Company 19 years	John Lowther GROWMARK, Inc. 20 years	Thomas Severson AgVantage FS 39 years	Lynn Smithson Central Ontario FS 50 years
10	20	30	40	50

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Agriculture isn't about gender; it's about dedication, knowledge, and commitment to the operation. Read more on page 22.