

Hagie Mfg. concentrates on innovation

Company focuses on homegrown application solutions

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CLARION - Three generations and 67 years after Ray Hagie's North Iowa farm became the birthplace of Hagie Manufacturing Co, in 1947, the business continues to provide some of the most advanced application equipment in the industry.

"It's almost a requirement to innovate here," said Newt Lingenfelter, product development manager at Hagie, "whether it's a small change or a big project.

"Hagie remains a pioneer in the ag industry with innovations such as front-mounted sprayer booms, hydrostatic drives, hydraulically adjustable booms and quick-attach systems that allow users to switch from a sprayer boom to a detasseler bar or a nitrogen toolbar in a matter of minutes."

Article Photos



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Hagie employee Charise Curda works on the sub-assembly line.

Precision is key with any application technology, Lingenfelter said. "Our equipment lets growers take 8 ounces of a crop protection product-that's about the size of a coffee cup-and spread it evenly over an acre."

Hagie's STS Series Nitrogen Tool Bar attachment allows the bar to float and follow the a field's contours, ensuring that nitrogen goes precisely where it should.

The NTB's high-clearance design also allows side-dress applications to be made exactly when the crop needs them.

"We're excited about this from both an economic and an environmental standpoint," Lingenfelter said.

Tools like the NTB can help growers meet Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, which is designed to limit the amount of nutrients delivered to the state's waterways and the Gulf of Mexico, he added.

As more farmers grow cover crops to help meet the INRS, Hagie is developing cover crop seeding equipment, said Rachel Halbach, an agronomist with Hagie.

The company's new "dry machine" has 60-foot booms and drop-tubes every 30 inches to broadcast seed just below the canopy.

Custom sprayer benefits winery

Corn growers aren't the only producers to benefit from high-tech application tools, but farmers who raise potatoes, watermelons, tomatoes, rice, cotton, soybeans, tobacco, blueberries, Christmas trees and grapes.

In 2012, Hagie created a customized sprayer for Tassel Ridge Winery in Leighton.

"They had been using a pull-type sprayer from Australia," Lingenfelter said, "but it wasn't meeting their needs.

"Due to issues with the machine's reliability and the limited availability of parts, there was too much downtime."

Spraying is a time-sensitive job, and Tassel Ridge Winery needed the ability to cover more acres quickly.

The company turned to Hagie, which built a high-clearance grape sprayer by taking one of its detasseling toolbars, mounting it on a Hagie sprayer, adding misting fans and making other modifications.

The new sprayer, which was delivered in April 2012, is four times faster than the sprayer the winery had been using.

"After a season of use, the sprayer has proven to be a win-win for everyone," Lingenfelter said.

Putting people first

Providing solutions is important to the employees of Hagie, where customers' inquiries are answered by real people, not automated recordings.

"Because we don't offer a multitude of products," Lingenfelter said, "our service technicians are experts in application equipment.

"We're focused on minimizing downtime and maximizing product performance - things we know are crucial when growers are working in the field."

This emphasis has propelled tremendous growth at Hagie, which has expanded from 150 employees in 2008 to nearly 500 employees today.

The company's domestic and international sales continue to trend upwards, said Lingenfelter, who noted that Hagie equipment is used across America, as well as in China, Ukraine, Argentina, Turkey and Australia.

"We don't have dealers and continue to follow the factory-direct model," Lingenfelter said. "We never want to be removed from our customers experience."

In early May 2013, Hagie announced plans for a \$22 million expansion to create more than 150 new jobs during the next three years.

The project will expand the company's production capability by adding new manufacturing methods, upgrading current production equipment, expanding the business's meeting and training facilities, and enhancing the company's research and development division.

"All of us at Hagie want to be a part of something great and see rural Iowa prosper," said Alan Hagie, Hagie's president and chief executive officer and grandson of company founder Ray Hagie.

A culture change

A key component of this goal involves attracting and retaining top talent at Hagie, which was named the No. 6 Top Iowa Workplace in 2011.

"We've been on a culture journey for about two years," Lingenfelter said, "to help us deal with change, adversity and opportunity.

"This journey is also influencing how we react to each other and work together more effectively."

Culture change at Hagie has taken many forms, he said, including:

Continuing education and leadership training. Each quarter, Hagie team members meet at an off-site location to learn new ways to improve their communication and interpersonal skills. The company employs a full-time goals coach to help employees advance their careers.

"Since it can be challenging to attract new hires to rural Iowa," Lingenfelter said, "we try to recruit and promote as much as we can from within the company." He said the strategy is working well.

Volunteer opportunities and philanthropy. Giving back to the local community is a high priority for Hagie, he said. Employees are given two vacation days a year to assist a local charity or participate in worthy causes like Meals from the Heartland, a non-profit organization comprised of volunteers who package meals for delivery to hungry people.

In 2013, the company purchased iPads for junior high students in the Clarion-Goldfield Community School District, said Amber Kohlhaas, brand manager at Hagie.

As the company focuses on the future, Hagie will keep striving to be the industry leader in the application business, said Alan Hagie.

One of the most powerful aspects of the human spirit is the ability to inspire and create, he said.

"Innovation is in everyone," Hagie said. "By empowering employees to innovate and improve processes, a sense of ownership is instilled that promotes growth across the entire organization.

"From there, it's about giving people the tools and getting out of the way."

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