

TRAILHEAD

"BRINGING INNOVATION AND SUCCESS TO THE SANDHILLS"

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PEOPLE MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

As we began to put this issue of *Trailhead* together, a common thread seemed to weave the articles together. It began with a decision to profile Wes Luther—an employee who has been serving Farmers Ranchers Co-op and its customers for 42 years. How many cooperatives—or any business, for that matter—can boast of that level of dedication and longevity?

While Wes' four-decade marathon stands in a class by itself, we realized that four other employees have worked here for 20-plus years. In fact, each article we selected for this issue says something important about the team at Farmers Ranchers and what they contribute each and every day.

Farmers Ranchers began in 1931. For the past 77 years, this cooperative has been all about providing products and services to its member owners. But that mission has always depended on the people behind the counter, mixing the feed, delivering the fuel, applying the fertilizer, selling the appliance, changing the tire, or calculating your patronage dividends.

Over the years, we've been fortunate to have a group of very dedicated

MANAGER'S MOMENT

by Keith Erickson
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employees who have handled those tasks, and many others. To them, working here has been more than just a job or a career. It's been about serving you, the customer. Even more, it's about serving you, their friend and neighbor. And as products and services change, and this company continues to evolve, we can look forward to a bright future, as long as we continue to find individuals with that same dedication.

I've had the good fortune of managing Farmers Ranchers going on 17 years, and other cooperatives before that. What I've discovered is that the employees who are successful and long-term are those who have a genuine interest in wanting to help people. After all, we're a service organization. You can buy products in other places. It's the people, and the service they provide, that make the difference. ■

Discover Farmers Ranchers' milestone moments by going to www.farmersrancherscoop.com and click on "Our History."

MEET THE MANAGER

Peggy Graham's face is familiar at the Ainsworth Ampride. This Ainsworth native has been behind the counter serving customers since the convenience store opened in 1996.

What is new is Peggy's title—and responsibilities. She became Ampride manager on January 1. So now, in addition to preparing the food and waiting on customers, Peggy is filling out fuel and inventory reports, handling invoices, scheduling employees, and opening the store's doors most week days.

"I open at 4 a.m.," says Peggy, "and there are sometimes people here waiting for me to open the doors." It's during those early hours that she hopes to get paperwork done, as well as get a head start on the donuts, cookies, subs, sandwiches, or multitude of other food items that tempt customers. The Ampride crew, which includes a total of seven full- and part-time employees, also takes special orders for things like decorated cakes and dinner rolls.

Peggy squeezes in time for family, including her husband Don, who drives everyday to his family ranch south of Winner. Even with her new duties she hopes to still find time to assist

"There isn't anything I don't like about this job... It's a good place to be."



with the occasional ranch duty. In addition, their daughter Dana's family in Norfolk includes two grandsons, who, she says, "I spoil whenever I can." That's a pleasure she doesn't get often enough with their son Dustin's two daughters since Dustin, who is in the Army, and his family live in Tennessee.

And even though her job is time consuming, she says she continues to enjoy coming to work every day. "There isn't anything I don't like about this job," says Peggy. "I like the people I work with and the customers. It's a good place to be." ■

FEED FOCUS

MEETING THE NEED

By Rocky Sheehan, Feed Division Manager, rsheehan@frcoop.com

It's great when customers respond to your product. Having a growing number of ranchers recognize the quality of the feed we produce, and the service we provide, is gratifying. For example, in January 2007, the feed mill in Ainsworth produced 4,518 tons of feed. This January, that number jumped to 7,163 tons. We're thankful for the increased demand, but when feed sales are growing at the same time you're putting in a new pellet mill, things can get a bit stressed.

That's why we're pleased to announce that as of mid-December, the 250-hsp pelleter, which doubles our manufacturing capability, is in and producing feed. Our Farmers Ranchers' feed team, under the supervision of mill operator Bill Worden, installed the used equipment themselves, saving the cooperative hundreds of thousands of dollars. The entire process did not go without challenges. We originally anticipated the pelleter would be ready in November. As that deadline passed, we were sometimes unable to keep up with the growing demand for our product. While we're still experiencing some growing pains, we continue to see improvements in efficiency, and expect our ability to keep up with demand in 2008. We thank our

customers for their patience and our entire feed team for their dedication and hard work.

To help us better serve you, we encourage those who will be needing creep feed later this year to book your feed needs ahead. To order, or for more information, contact your feed stores at Ainsworth (402-387-2533), Valentine (402-376-3045 or 866-376-3045), or the Keya Paha Division at Springview (402-497-2020). ■



A crane lifts equipment that helps put the finishing touches on the new pellet mill installed at the feed mill this winter.

CONFIDENT AND READY

As area farmers prepare for the 2008 crop year, Farmers Ranchers Agronomy Division Manager Kenny Eggers has to be a step ahead. But this 15-year veteran is confident in the co-op's state-of-the-art facility, up-to-date equipment, and a staff of experienced employees ready to spring into action.

"Experience pays in this business," says Kenny. "It makes a big difference when our employees have been here awhile, especially when applying fertilizers and chemicals. They know the customer, where individual fields are, and they know the machinery."

It also helps to have a high-performing fertilizer plant that can keep up with the flurry of spring activity. "We can blend almost any liquid to our customers' specific requests," says Kenny, who explains that more than 10,000 tons of liquid fertilizer ran through the fertilizer plant just west of Ainsworth in 2007.

Four 3,000-gallon overhead tanks, one dedicated for water and the others to product, can fill incoming trucks quickly—getting them back out to the farmer and the field. Out of sight is a blending system for chemicals that utilizes dedicated lines for corn and soybeans. There's also a sophisticated computer system that makes sure certain products are blended specifically to a customer's needs.

Farmers Ranchers takes extra steps to ensure certain products are put on the right fields in the right amounts.



Kenny Eggers checks a customer's field location on the map showing the large territory covered by Farmers Ranchers.

Besides a dependence on field maps, the cooperative's two dry floaters are equipped with the VIPER precision application system—including mapping software. In fact, when our sales crew visits you, they obtain your fields' GPS information. When it's time to apply product, the data is inserted into the machine's software. We're ready to get the product on your field without bothering you again for specific field data. Add to that a fleet of additional equipment, including a liquid floater and trucks.

And, for the customer's convenience, Farmers Ranchers carries an extensive supply of plastic hoses and parts for their spraying and planting equipment.

"We've got an excellent crew of people, and the product, equipment, and facility to back them up," says Kenny. "I feel confident that we can handle and deliver product to our customers in a very timely fashion." ■



Justin Nelson can customize fertilizer loads from the control room at the Agronomy Center.

WHO'S WHO IN AGRONOMY

NAME/DUTIES/YEARS OF SERVICE

KEN EGGERS (MANAGER)—15 YEARS

RALPH DAVIS (TRUCK DRIVER)—26 YEARS

DAN DRAKE (OPERATOR)—9 YEARS

DAVID FISHER (OPERATOR)—4 YEARS

KEVIN FOBROY (OPERATOR)—LESS THAN ONE YEAR

CINDY KEMP (RECEPTIONIST/BILLING)—2 YEARS

ALLAN LEAR (TRUCK DRIVER/OPERATOR)—LESS THAN ONE YEAR

JUSTIN NELSON (LIQUID BLENDER)—7 YEARS

KEVIN PICKHINKE (SEED SALES/OPERATOR)—3 YEARS

GEORGIA SYLVESTOR (OPERATOR)—1½ YEARS

GERALD (CHOPPER) WATTS (TRUCK DRIVER)—23 YEARS





EMPLOYEE PROFILE: WES LUTHER

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Let's get one thing straight. Wes Luther has worked for Farmers Ranchers longer than any other employee. And, even though he's been a fixture at the cooperative for a whopping 42 years, this is not a retirement profile. Wes, we hope, will be showing up for work at the Ainsworth Appliance Center every morning for some time to come. It just seemed fitting that anyone who has worked for more than four decades for one company deserved recognition.

This Propane and Appliance Manager began as a Farmers Ranchers service station attendant back in 1966. Just 19, and one of eight employees, including the manager, Wes expected the job to be temporary. Instead, he started delivering propane and fertilizer, worked at the feed mill, and became service station manager. In 1984, when the cooperative purchased Petrolane, Wes was named to his current position—a job he's held, and enjoyed, ever since.

What has changed in 42 years? "Everything," says Wes, as he begins ticking off major events at Farmers Ranchers like a walking history book. Events like moving the dry fertilizer plant west of Ainsworth in 1966, and purchasing Rogers Grain and Feed in 1971, show, he says, the cooperative's ability to adapt to change.

In 42 years, he has worked with just three managers (and an interim manager). That, he insists, says something about the stability of management and employees at Farmers Ranchers. "There has been a low turnover rate of employees here," says Wes. "The managers and people I have worked with through the years have been great."

On the personal side, Wes married Shari when he'd been at the cooperative for just three years. The couple's children, Wade, Suzi, and Cody are now grown—living in Lincoln, Linwood, and Howells. In addition to enjoying their four grandchildren, much of Wes' free time is spent fencing or fixing things at their farm and pasture land outside of town. He's also got a once-a-week golfing date during the summer. "My golf game is terrible," admits Wes, "but nobody enjoys playing more than I do."

It's probably safe to say that nobody enjoys work more than Wes does, either. "This has been a good place to work," says Wes. "I wasn't expecting 42 years, but I can't think of anything I would rather have done." ■



PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Others who have served Farmers Ranchers customers for more than 20 years are: Danny Bennett, appliance service, 32 years; Billy Assarsson, feed delivery, 29 years; Ralph Davis, agronomy, 26 years; Gerald (Chopper) Watts, agronomy, 23 years; and Bill Worden, mill operations manager, 21 years. Thanks for your dedication and loyalty!

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INSIDE

**AGRONOMY IS
READY**

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