

Hudye Soil Services celebrates 25 years

"Helping to feed the world" is the new motto of Hudye Soil Services Inc.

An exercise in assessing the effort put in the business over the past 25 years has resulted in a new motto for the company and the theme for the upcoming Field of Dreams tour on July 31, says Ben Hudye, one of the owners.

"One of the most honourable ways of making a living is helping to produce the world's food supply," he said. It's not a new idea, but it remains as poignant.

After a quarter century, the direction of Hudye Soil Services remains driven by customer demand, Hudye said. From the first day, the business grew in direct response to what the customer base needed, with a major emphasis on the word "service."

The roots of the business can be traced back to a disaster for Hudye Farms in 1982 when an early frost did tremendous crop damage, he recalls. With the other shareholders, his father Paul, and his brother Greg, it was decided to form a company to assure themselves of a secure supply of crop inputs. On April 12, 1983, Hudye Soil Services was incorporated and a plant was set up on the outskirts of Norquay.

It was initially intended as an extension of the farming business, but it immediately took off. Neighbours and farmers from the area turned to the soil service business for their inputs, such as fertilizer, chemicals and seed. Offering professional and technological services to go along with the products became natural. Supplying the demand that continued to grow is the simple business strategy that proved successful.

Service is stressed

Stressing the service aspect, Hudye said the soil services business operates under a three-part philosophy: "Help our customers maximize

their productivity; help our customers maximize what they get paid from the grain markets, and help our customers work their financial options (the do's and don'ts of marketing)."

Customers can receive help in every aspect of marketing and financial management, he said. A producer benefits from being a part of a network that shares the same goals and objectives.

That's where professional service comes into play, Hudye said. Agronomists are part of the staff to provide customers with the latest in research and expertise.

Hudye Soil Services is still a family corporation. In addition to the original partners, Nathan (Greg's son) and Braden and James (Ben's sons) have joined the fold. It sometimes gets a little confusing because there are eight separate corporations run by Hudye family members. Between Hudye Farms and Hudye Soil Services, there are as many as 50 employees during the peak seasons. At least five of those employees have been a part of the business for the 25-year duration.

In 1987, when it became impractical to serve customers in the Sturgis-Preeceville area from Norquay, the Sturgis plant was added. The Kamsack plant was added in 2002. Each plant can professionally serve producers for a 30-mile radius. Plans are already in the works to establish new plants as the clientele base and demand grows.

Field of Dreams

Established in 1999, the Field of Dreams annual tour has become the hallmark of what Hudye Soil Services offers its customers, said Hudye. By putting the leading edge research, new technologies, new practices and new genetics and chemistry to the test, customers can expect to see research and development conducted in the most transparent manner.

"We test any and every aspect that would add productivity. Some work and some don't."

Much of what is learned from the Field of Dreams is put into the regular farming practices, Hudye said. This year, Hudye Farms will have about 15,000 acres in crop in this area and through separate holdings, will have another 13,000 acres in crop on the American side of the border.

There is a lot of research data available, but the Field of Dreams puts that data to the test "on our soil type and in our climate," he said.

Each year, the annual tour attracts about 600 persons, many coming from as far as Ontario, Hudye said. When the season is over, the results from each test and experiment are made available for all to see on the company's website.

Hudye Soil Services is not a monopoly, he says. Making the science work for producers is a passion and it is a service. "After all, we are one of our biggest customers."

Looking at the business from a more philosophical aspect, Hudye says farming has gone through three revolutions. After each, productivity increased so much, that it could never revert.

The first was mechanical revolution. From using animal power, farmers turned to using engine-driven machinery.

The second was the green revolution which is much more recent. Instead of using summerfallow in a rotation, producers turned to crop inputs such as fertilizer and chemicals, and capitalized on developments in genetics. Land was put into continuous production and the added productivity meant there was no reason to ever go back to summerfallow.

"We're just getting into the third revolution – that's the marketing revolution," Hudye said. To do his marketing, producers are realizing they need more than a three-ton truck. They need a



With plants in Norquay, Sturgis and Kamsack, Hudye Soil Services is celebrating 25 years of being in business and serving producers in the general area. Through this business venture has come the annual Field of Dreams tour and the application of cutting-edge technologies and practices in association with new products and improved genetics. The company's motto has become "Helping to feed the world" and that will be the theme of the Field of Dream tour on July 31.

network. They need to be plugged into greater organizations which share the best interests of the producers. Farmers are eagerly turning to the many marketing tools now available to them. "Their network is growing as we speak."

There are substantial financial gains to be made by good, sharp marketing, he said. This is where Hudye Soil Services comes in. It can offer independent advice because a successful customer means more success for the business.

Personal vantage point

Personally, Hudye says he feels blessed by the success of the business and blessed by the quality of the employees.

"We feel very fortunate" for the opportunity of adding value to the customer's effort, he said.

It has always been an important principle of business for every family member to give back to the communities which has given them so much, Hudye said. "Being good corporate citizens is a very important aspect of our philosophy."

Each year, the companies make donations adding up to six digit figures, he said.

Through the 1980s and 1990, the business lived through some of the toughest farming times since the 1930s, but it was able to work with customers and benefit them. "It was a win-win situation and it got us through those tough times."

In farming there are always challenges, Hudye said. The weather is never perfect. It is always too wet or too dry, too hot or too cold. There are challenges with equip-

ment and government regulations and even in acquiring human resources, "but that's what makes the business interesting. It's about facing the challenges and persevering."

The business has already been in the hands of three generations and it is inspiring to see the vim and vigour that exists in the young Hudye generation, he said. "They have a different perspective and they want to push the envelope. That promotes change and progress."

On one hand, Hudye said he can foresee the time when he will take himself out of the business picture and the boys will be blazing new horizons, but on the other hand, he looks to his father, Paul, who is in his 80s. Paul is still an active participant in the company's board meetings.