

# THE QUARTERLY KERNEL

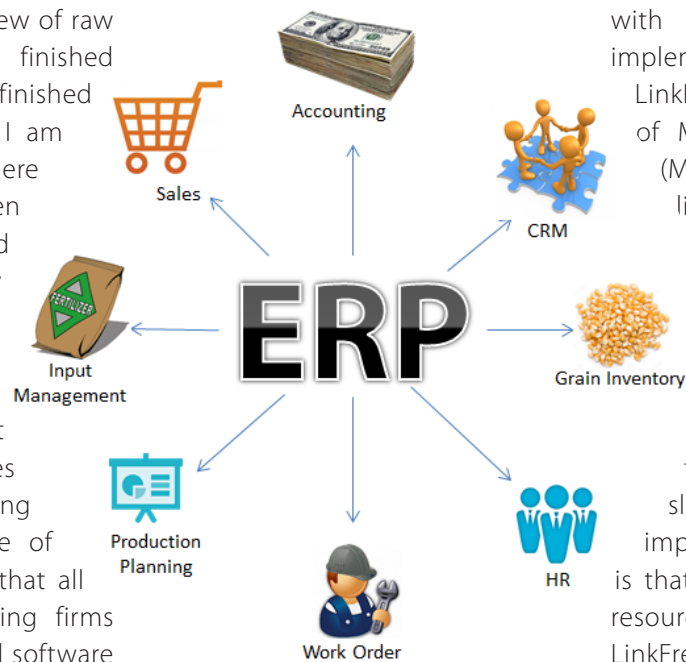


SUMMER 2015

It's hard to convince most farmers that our vocation is, at its essence, a manufacturing process. This manufacturing process is not dissimilar to production of a computer or any household goods. According to Webster's dictionary, manufacturing is "something made from raw materials by hand or by machinery". This is precisely what row crop agriculture does on a yearly basis. We are utilizing a slew of raw materials and growing a finished good, in our case this finished good is corn. However, I am not willing to say that there aren't differences between manufacturing corn and a widget on an assembly line, but this difference is minimal enough that as we look to remove waste and become more efficient we should look to processes utilized by the manufacturing world to guide us. One of the most basic of things that all factories and manufacturing firms utilize is a computer based software suite that controls all aspects of their business. Tracking raw inputs, supply chain activities, work flow, and finished goods are duties that a material requirements planning (MRP) system does with great ease. When you add the capacities of finance and human resources management to the MRP system the end product becomes an enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. An

ERP system captures and manages all aspects of business activities.

There is currently no ERP system being utilized by row crop operations in the United States. There are several half-solutions that achieve aspects of a traditional ERP, but not a true ERP solution that flows through the entire business cycle and captures this information in a central location. It became clear to us



and our peer group, FamilyFarms Group, that we wanted a legitimate ERP solution and we began the several year process of selecting and installing the best product.

There are more than a several options when it comes to an ERP system to help run your business, the most common being SAP and Oracle. These large ERP systems are arguably the most popular and most heard of

when it comes to the manufacturing world. The issue with these options is just the cost and scale of the product. Companies such as BP and Coca-Cola utilize SAP and it truly is much to encompassing of a solution for a row crop farming operation. We needed to have something much smaller and more reasonably priced. After a fact-finding trip to Silicon Valley, we chose to move forward with a United Kingdom-based implementer named LinkFresh.

LinkFresh is a licensed implementer of Microsoft Dynamics Navision (Microsoft NAV). NAV is a SAP-lite for small to medium sized businesses. Much more ideal for our needs than the ERP heavyweights discussed earlier. The user interface is very similar any other Microsoft product, making the user learning curve a slightly flatter one. What is important to know understand is that while NAV is the enterprise resource planning software package, LinkFresh is the company we utilized to customize it for our specific needs. This process is similar in the way that when you purchase a Ford Taurus you cannot buy it directly from Ford Motor Company, you must buy it through a dealer that helps order the customized end product that you are looking for. LinkFresh was chosen for this implementation because they have successfully implemented and customized NAV for companies in





## ERP continued...

the fruit and vegetable markets.

JCS Family Farms was one of two farms in our peer group that were chosen to begin the process of customizing Microsoft NAV to fit the needs of row crop operations across the country. This process began about a year ago with discussions with LinkFresh to help understand the large picture of our farming process as well as understanding what NAV was capable of doing "out of the box". These customizations ranged from as simple as programming corn weighing 56 lbs a bushel to as elaborate as coding the finished good delivery process and tying premiums and price deductions back through to the original

grower agreement with the grain processor.

I don't want to bore you with the painful specifics of everything that went in to this programming and testing process, but rest assured it was really something. The big picture of this process was LinkFresh programmed the product, JCS tested the product, LinkFresh reprogrammed, JCS retested, and so on... and on... and on. While it was hard to stay energized through this laborious process, we all knew it was essential to get the final product that we all wanted.

One aspect of our future system that was not just customizing an established product, but creating from scratch, was in regards

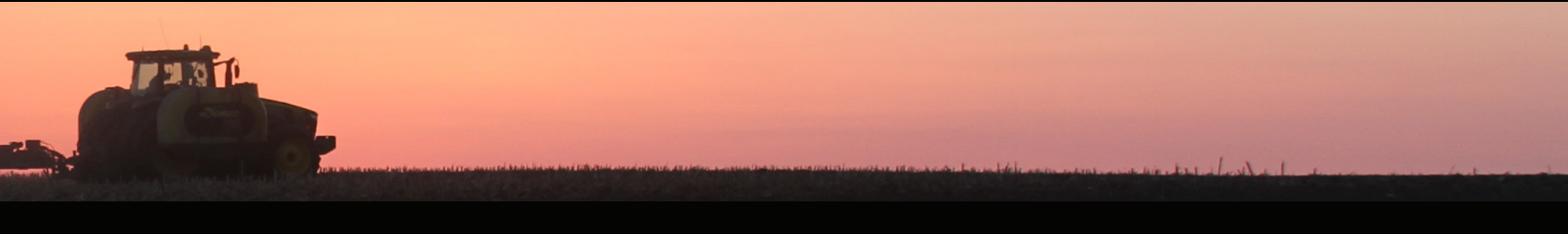
to the mobile application. We require a mobile instance of the NAV product that will enable our operations employees to enter data in the field. Today, the actual usage totals of products are manually entered into our accounting system off of our in-cab data gathering system. With the new system, we will enter this information on an iPad which will flow immediately into our finance system. This real-time gathering process will be one of the most improved areas of our current process.

Only time will tell if our ERP solution is as valuable to our operation as we think it will be. Stay tuned for additional updates.

**By Rob Sladek**



*At JCS Family Farms each year around Christmas we take time to spend with our employees to celebrate the holiday season and the prior year of hard work. Our employees sacrifice time away from their families in both spring and the fall to do a job that we love to do, which is farm! We wanted to do something a little different to show appreciation of our employees and take them to an NFL football game in St. Louis where the Rams play. We had the opportunity to take our employees on a Christmas party excursion and were fortunate enough to be hosted by Monsanto to enjoy the game from a private suite; it was also Farmer appreciation night at the game as well which was quite appropriate. While we were in St. Louis we were able to do a couple of other fun tours which included touring Monsanto's research facility and the Budweiser Brewery. It was a great time had by all and provided a bit of recharge before beginning another exciting year on the farm.*



## The Tree Continues to Grow

By Cathy Sladek

Wow! What a strange, exciting and demanding beginning to 2015 we here at JCS Family Farms have survived! You'll read in other articles about the weather and its stresses, operational demands and readjustments but I want to share with you the most important part of early 2015, that being that Jim and I were blessed with three more grandchildren! Rob and

Carrie welcome Son, Lane, into the family on January 11th. Big brother James was very excited, as were we all. A bit later, Jim and I traveled to Texas to meet grandchildren #4 and #5. Luke and Lila joined their family on April 25th. Parents, Gabe and Ann and big brother Levi have their hands full. Once again, we feel truly blessed with all these new additions to our families. It's

cherished life events like these that truly refocus the emphasis of what is most important in life and provide clarity to our decisions we make as a farming family. We are farming to hopefully provide an opportunity to this new generation to do what the five generations proceeding has loved to do, farm.

**Remember!**  
As we begin fall operations, make plans to try and stop out for a combine ride. It is truly an amazing experience.



Luke Young

Lila Young



Lane Sladek

### New additions to the Operations Group



Joel Ploggenpohl



Corey Cleavenger



Conrad Bensch



Pierre Bensch

We cannot do what we do without a fantastic group of employees. Make sure to stop and introduce yourself as we begin fall work on your fields.





# Notes from the Old Cob...

## Changing the Way We Farm... and Where We Fish

Our latest irrigation project, which is taking longer and costing more than planned, is almost complete and should be ready to use if the wet pattern we've been experiencing changes this summer. As the project has progressed, we've become more excited for the potential it has to change the way we farm.

As one of the first "Drainage Water Capture for Irrigation" projects in the state of Iowa, it has also caught the interest of Professor Christopher Anderson, Assistant Director, ISU Climate Science Program. Earlier this year he facilitated a meeting in which I described our project to a group of ISU faculty which included Climatology, Agronomy,

Ag Engineering, and Extension, as well as several others from the private sector. This group is working on Water Capture and Reuse for Irrigation as a means



to improve crop yields, improve water quality, and counteract weather variability. They are currently seeking various sources of funding to support research and would like to work with us and our agronomist, John McGillicuddy, to help develop field trials on our farm.

Because irrigation is a relatively new practice on highly productive soils in Iowa, its use creates more questions than answers as to how removing water as a limiting factor affects our potential. If you asked me today, "What is a realistic yield goal with irrigation?" I'm not sure I'd have a good answer. However, if you asked me "Do you think you'll enjoy catching the fish you stocked this spring with your grandchildren?".....No research required!

-Jim Sladek

## Chinese Salad

*A perfect light meal for a summer evening*

### Salad

2 pkg - Romain Noodles (chicken flavored)

1/2 C. - Browned, slivered almonds

1 C. - Browned sunflower seeds

2- 1lb. packages shredded cabbage

6 - Green onions - chopped

2 C. - cooked chicken

### Dressing

1/2 C. - Oil

1/4 C. - Vinegar

1/2 C. - Sugar

*Prepare Dressing: Bring to a boil all dressing ingredients and let cool while preparing salad.*

*Prepare noodles according to package directions. Cool.*

*In large bowl, combine cooled noodles, almonds, sunflower seeds, cabbage, onions, and chicken.*

*Toss to blend. Coat salad with dressing. Refrigerate 6 hours. Toss and Serve.*

