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Ag's Next Gen Dealers Are Building Businesses And Saving Growers Big Money

"Just be willing to bet on yourself and push ahead..."

Columbus, Oh., June 22, 2021 – Season after season, Ty Fickenscher of Upward Ag, LLC of Axtell, Neb., has come alongside his fellow farmers to help them make the most of their land. Precision agriculture, strip-till, field data and decisions – he's worked with them to coax higher yields and better return on investment (ROI) from every acre.

"I get a lot of satisfaction from helping them meet their goals," Fickenscher says. "For me it's about nurturing soil, raising good crops and helping farm families."

Now he's added a new business to take them further. Upward Ag now offers crop inputs for Meristem Crop Performance, a new, hybrid, direct-to-farm input supplier. Upward Ag is part of a growing number of operations across America adding an additional farm-based business in order to supplement their income and spread out their existing infrastructure costs.

"It's been a great fit. Being able to get the highest-quality products at a fair price point is very important to my farmers," says Ty. "Not only that, but they are also becoming more skeptical of the true motives of big companies when they ask for so much data. Meristem has done a great job of being transparent and easy to work with. And the products are very, very good."

For those desiring to build a farm-based business, current disruption in agriculture's crop input distribution channel could make it the perfect time to get started. E-commerce and leaner distribution models are bringing better efficiency. Carl Zulauf, Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics at Ohio State University, says there will always be opportunities in the midst of market change. "The very things moving consolidation across agriculture are the things that are bringing opportunities," he says, "The market is always creating and destroying opportunities."

A key market driver, says Mitch Eviston, founder and CEO of Meristem, is that smart farm operators are learning they can separate agronomy decisions from their crop input choices. "They have their own local data and their own agronomic advice. That frees them to buy from new suppliers like Meristem and access the same or better quality faster and at much lower prices."

Justin Ogle, a farmer skilled in data management, says being a dealer for Meristem is a natural extension of the farm business he and partner Brad Majors have at Record Harvest near Nevada, Mo. He says they've tested the quality of Meristem's products and now sell them to others.

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“Margins in ag are very thin. To move the needle up on ROI, you’re going to have to do things differently,” he says. “With Meristem, we are able to drop the cost of most inputs up to 30 percent – that’s a big difference.” At that cost, it doesn’t take much of a yield bump, says Ogle, to put a plant growth regulator (PGR) or special starter fertilizer to work. Or simply use the savings for other family needs such as college or upgrading their vehicles. “Either way, they get to choose. It’s money that’s staying with them on the farm and not going out of town to some big corporation.”

Travis Koenig, owner of Koenig Seed N Treat, Postville, Iowa, says many of his customers are turned off by recent consolidation in crop input suppliers and are looking for better alternatives. Koenig, who also farms with his father Dennis and his uncle, Joe, says that means opportunity for him. “A lot of these farmers just don’t like corporate – they want to buy from local folks,” he says. “With Meristem, I’m able to provide the sort of high-quality products they need, at better prices. They also like buying from an experienced farmer who tests everything he sells on his own ground, too.”

“If you are currently farming or in a farm-service business and are looking for ways to diversify and add to your income, connect with us,” says Rob McClelland, president of Meristem. “We are growing quickly and looking for more quality dealers to help us save farmers money.” McClelland says a special dealer recruitment page at MeristemAg.com is available for those interested in learning more.

For Patrick Conyeya and Justin Clark, launching C&C Ag Solutions in Mayfield, Ky. was about having the freedom to better serve growers with the consulting services and products they need to be successful on their specific farm with their specific goals. Both partners had worked before for large corporations and had felt hamstrung by systems that were distant and often unresponsive.

“Farmers are dealing with so many new puzzle pieces,” says Conyeya. “They are looking for help in putting those pieces together. They are looking for someone to come alongside them and help them figure it out.” He adds that having the right inputs at the right price extends that service mentality. “Meristem’s experience with sourcing high-quality inputs and saving growers money is an important part of us being able to carry out the “Farmer First” mission of our business.”

Clark says he wishes he and Conyeya would have “not been so scared” and launched the business earlier. “To anyone thinking about starting your own business and working with Meristem, I would say just do it. Just be willing to bet on yourself and push ahead,” says Clark. “If you are doing the right thing for your customers, if you are willing to put in the effort, you will be successful.”