

tion audit during the last part of June. If successful, the ISO program will be in place for the fall harvest. I will be able to test the system with the spring planting and summer field operations before the actual certification. This will allow for any flaws to be corrected before that time. It is going to take a certain amount of discipline to document all of the activities, especially with a one man shop like mine. Farmers by nature are not paper people. However, a paper trail is the heart of the ISO system. Like Reggie has often said, "If it isn't recorded it didn't happen." Success or failure will be contingent upon my attentiveness to this detail.

Developing an ISO system for my farm has pulled together a number of separate record programs I have been utilizing in my operation. These included financial, equipment maintenance, crop management database, farm service agency records, crop insurance records, field yield data, and inventory control. There has never been a lot of commonality between these different programs. Now each of these becomes an individual block that are patched together to become the ISO quilt to blanket the farm operation.

The ISO system allowed for an objective review of a contract opportunity for non-GMO soybeans for 2003. In this case process, it resulted in rejecting the contract. Our local cooperative is part of an alliance supporting the soybean processing plant and the contract would have been coordinated through their office. The plant is located further away from our normal delivery location and has a wider basis as well. Because of this, the extra cost of transportation would use a significant portion of the premium offered. In addition, the contract specifications called for a very tight tolerance of GMO soybeans that would be difficult to achieve. In consultation with Dr. Charles Hurburgh, it appeared that this tolerance probably could not be obtained by the protocol suggested by the contract. These reservations were expressed to the local cooperative personell in charge of the procurement.

The ISO system allows for a documented traceability from the purchase of the seed, planting in the

field, crop monitoring during the growing season and harvest. This continues with the delivery of the produced crop to the storage facility and ultimately the delivery to the end user. Once the product is delivered to the enduser there is a follow up communication on customer satisfaction. There is communication with others involved with the operation as well, such as landlords and farm managers.

Critical Review

I still struggle with the relativeness of it all. Is all of this work worthwhile and will there be a payback? At this point the marketplace has a lot of interest in the ISO process but they have not backed it up with their checkbook. Some Innovative Grower members have participated in trade missions to Japan and they report that when they convey to them that they are ISO certified their interest really picks up. It may take a number of years to generate the revenue needed to offset the costs associated with ISO.

There may be other considerations for the adoption of ISO by farmers. Environmental and food safety issues are a couple that come to mind. ISO would work well in addressing these concerns. It is kind of like "do it before it is done to me."

For me personally at age 63, I doubt that I will fully benefit from the adoption of the ISO system. However, as I mentioned earlier, I have a son that farms with me and there may come a point in his career that he will need to utilize the process. From that standpoint I am willing to go through the effort needed to adopt the ISO system to agriculture. I have been able to take advantage of agriculture programs my ancestors put in place before me without any direct benefit to them. They just knew it needed to be done for the future good of the sector.

Conclusions

As you have heard today there are a number of Quality Management Systems being adopted for production agriculture. What may end up happening is that there will develop a tiered quality system for agriculture with ISO probably at the top of the pyramid and two or three layers of quality assurance

underneath with varying degrees of sophistication. Hopefully, there will be some standardization of criteria between the different systems for the ease of transfer of information.

It is kind of like the adoption of the three-point hitch by the machinery equipment industry. We currently can couple different brands of tractors to many different kinds of implements with the use of a common hitch. This allows for a multitude of personal preferences and needs to be satisfied.

We will need this kind of standardization in agricultural quality management systems if we desire the same degree of flexibility. Hopefully, it won't be the Bill Gates definition where the strongest becomes the standard.

I would like to thank the ISU Extension Service for its help and support in this process. I certainly appreciate all of the effort they have put forth and it would not have happened without it.
