

# Are Computers Needed in Agriculture?



By Michelle Blomberg

How to make computerized management systems work for your business

**T**he world is changing rapidly. When I first took over my mom and dad's agriculture computer systems business 20 years ago, it was a challenge to get cooperatives and other ag-related businesses to see the advantage of automating their accounting and managing the company's books with computerized management software.

The systems were shockingly expensive and needed staff to run them. Moving into the late '90s, the challenge was the impression that computer systems only cost money and didn't "make" money. I'd hear, "That spreader over there brings in cash. What can that computer bring me?"

Today, without a computerized solution to manage your business — and not just accounting, but all of your corporate diversities — you not only are losing customers, you're biding time until your neighboring competitor will pounce on this weakness. The ag-focused computer systems that exist today are proven solutions, will show an immediate return on investment (ROI) and will convince your customers that you are partnered with them for the future of their business.

The computer systems and automation available for managing grain, the core of many ag businesses, are leading edge. RFID reading of trucks as they enter the facility creates efficiencies and deepens relationships. Message boards showing who they are and what crop they are carrying as they pull onto the scale put a smile on the drivers' faces who know they are being cared for right from the start. Emailing the scale ticket to the farmer completes the process.

The ability to email grain settlement information and ACH the dollars to the farmer's account shows that you care enough to put the money in their hands as quickly as possible. Invoices, statements, grain contracts (with signatures), AP vouchers, payroll stubs and much more can all be emailed automatically, reducing the amount of paper generated from the business. With these automations come auto pay capabilities. You can have all of these items directly deposited, and reversely, pulled from your customers' accounts.

In the agronomic portion of your business, the software solutions available blend product based on historical data from the field, dispatch the product to the equipment in the field, allows changes to the blended product as it moves through the field, brings it back to the system, and still offers prepay and other contracts to bill it to precision. Furthermore, this is all immediately viewable on the Web.

Many ag businesses need to track their "position" of products, so when they purchase product from a vendor and then sell it to the farmer, they always know exactly how much inventory they have on hand. With computerized management, this is all available on a hand-held device.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. If you feel as though your agribusiness is falling behind on the technology playing field and don't have a computerized management system in most or all the areas of your business today, you are missing the "sure-hit" that will take you to the next generation of agriculture. ■

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