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GROWERS MINERAL

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THE FARMERS SOLUTION



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The Growers Solution

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SUMMER SWEET. SWEEET CORN

by Chris Kohls, Growers Mineral Sales Manager

We were finishing up our summer western crop and farm tour, visiting our North Dakota and Minnesota customers. Our last stop, before we headed home, was the Janson family farm located in Pierz, Minnesota—a beautiful farm of 260 acres producing corn, soybeans, and sweet corn. Rodger Janson, a fourth-generation farmer and his wife, Janice, along with son Keith and several other family members, care for the farm and the operations. They not only farm, but also have a manure pumping business, sell crop insurance, and have sweet corn stands throughout the area. Quite a business, and a very well-run business!

Upon arriving at the farm, we met with Keith, who would be our tour guide. The day was overcast, and it looked like rain was on its way. After discussing the farm operations we proceeded to the sweet corn fields. After all, that is what the farm is known for: Sweet, Sweet Corn!

When we arrived at the fields, you would think you're in sweet corn heaven. The fields were nearly perfect: clean green, and full of wonderful ears of sweet corn. The ears were large, white, and had an unbelievable taste (we had to sample a few)! That day, they were harvesting the sweet corn by

"Sweet Corn," continued on page 4

INTRODUCING JAMES SCHILTZ CCA TECHNICAL AGRONOMIST

Allow me to introduce myself as the newest member of the Research, Education, and Sales team. Since coming on board in April, it has been fulfilling to work with everyone in the Growers network to date.

Growing up in agriculture needless to say, it runs in the veins. As far as our family is aware, I'm the seventh generation to be farming. Who knows how much farther back it goes, but let's call that rooted. My grandfather farmed and then worked for several farmers due to declining health. After traveling the country to work for several operations, including a Luden's cough drop corporate farm, his battle with type 1 diabetes got the better of him. To the man I've never met, I toast his drive to keep the Schiltz name connected to agriculture.

In 1985, my dad bought his first farm and started raising hogs in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Then in 1998, he cashed in on land prices and moved to Franklin County in northern New York. There, we ran a dairy for several years, and now my younger brother runs an organic food-grade grain operation.

Deciding to pursue higher education, I traveled to Crookston in the Red River Valley (Minnesota/North Dakota border). The saying, "Go west, young man," has echoed in my mind for years. Ultimately, I attribute this path to Lieutenant Colonel Kreger. He was an excellent family friend and a good influence on my brothers and me. He handed me a copy of *Acres USA* magazine at 14 years of age, and said, "You should read this." From there, the importance of calcium and fostering the soil microbiome began to burn into my memory.

The next year, we had severe pink eye in the beef cows, and one of the authors talked about

"James Schiltz," continued on page 2



James Schiltz, Growers Mineral Agronomist, and Keith Janson in the sweet corn field.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Hope to see you soon!

This fall, Growers Mineral, Corp. is scheduled to set up and staff booths at the following upcoming farm shows. It's a great time to stop in and review your plant food and mineral supplement program, hear about new developments at Growers, or just chat with the folks who make it all happen—your friends and neighbors.

Jan 7-9 Tues-Thurs	Keystone Farm Show York, PA
Jan 9-11 Thurs-Sat	Southeast Fruit & Veg Conference Savannah, GA
Jan 13-16 Mon-Thurs	Delaware AG Week Harrington, DE
Jan 14-16 Tues-Thurs	Fort Wayne Farm Show Fort Wayne, IN
Jan 16-18 Thurs-Sat	Virginia Farm Show Fishersville, VA
Jan 16 Thursday	Peanut Farm Show & Conference Tifton, GA

REMEMBER: MONTHLY CONFERENCE CALL

On the second Thursday of the month at 9:00 PM Eastern for the months of September through April, we hold a conference call usually featuring a picture from the Growers Calendar along with other important agricultural events. There is no participation charge for the call. For the call, dial 1-646-558-8656 (US) or 1-438-809-7799 (CAN). The Meeting ID is 359 647 7278.

"James Schiltz," continued from page 1

kelp and its iodine levels as a remedy. A month later, it proved true with a 98% success rate. Certainly now I would take a much bigger-picture approach to addressing this in the forage quality and soil.

Over the last ten years, I've worked in retail agronomy with a wide variety of operations, including grain, vegetables, fruit, grass-fed beef, nursery stock, sugar beets, and several other specialty crops. It has been a healthy challenge as well as fulfilling to see soils, plants, and livestock improve or come back to life. My focus has been on using calcium, cover crops, and high-quality fertilizer ingredients to improve things from the soil up. The saying, "Given the opportunity, biology will trump chemistry every time," summarizes it well. Cover crops and mob grazing have been key tools in building soil health. The natural world never ceases to amaze.

Now, being on the Growers team, I look forward to working with you to further the mission of our founders. We have an excellent history that speaks of steadiness and dedication to the customer. See you in the field as we work on exactly this. ■

GMS 2X2 AND MOTHER NATURE

by Jim Halbeisen, Director of Research

In recent years, research conducted by Growers Mineral, Corp. has demonstrated the effectiveness of using GMS in a 2x2 position at planting, especially with corn. Several articles have appeared in *The Growers Solution* discussing explanations and yields while using GMS in the 2x2 position along with the conventional in-furrow application of GMS. As gms customers discover, the success of using GMS at the 2x2 position, some interesting results have come to light.

For example, the picture in the 2024 Growers Mineral, Corp. calendar for the month of March has received the attention of both customers and potential customers. Actually, the customer whose corn is in that March 2024 calendar photo had a very valid question about the corn root seeking out the GMS at the 2x2 position. The question was very simple: "I know I put the GMS at the 2x2 position. How did the seed know that?" At the time (May, 2023) of the question, I had absolutely no idea what the answer could be until an Internet search of *phys.org* on December 6, 2023.

In *Nature Chemical Biology*, the National University of Singapore and the Singapore Center for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering uncovered one of nature's most potent tools: agro-microbials (agro-chemicals of natural origin) that can enhance the synergy between crops and microbes.

In a five-year study that began in 2018, the scientists discovered that a well known hormone released by plants called methyl jasmonate (MeJA) served as a language source that allows a plant to communicate with the surrounding layers of microorganisms embedded in the soil. The MeJA is a volatile organic compound (VOC). Think gasoline fumes.

The research team made several important discoveries:

- Using an engineered airflow system, scientists have found, for the first time, the MeJA is released underground by plant roots in a volatile form;

"GMS 2x2," continued on page 4

MARKETS AND WHERE TO?

by James Schiltz CCA, Agronomist

While reflecting on the definitions of farming and food, one can't help but think of the challenges as well as the rewarding occupation that agriculture is. Today's commonplace commodity agriculture of raising grain crops in a saturated market has caused a decline in pricing, while farm profits are more than 20% down. This being the challenge, a famous saying comes to mind: "Necessity is the mother of invention."

Agriculture's roots run deep, paralleling the human race. I have not read a history book where people did not eat. Looking at the definition of **agriculture**, one finds it refers to the practice of cultivating plants, raising animals, and producing food, fiber, and other agricultural products for human or industrial use. It is the process of harnessing and modifying the environment to grow crops, rear livestock, and manage natural resources to meet the needs of human populations. Going a step further, **food** is defined as a substance consisting essentially of protein, carbohydrate, fat, and other nutrients used in the body of an organism to sustain growth and vital processes, and to furnish energy. The absorption and utilization of food by the body is fundamental nutrition and is facilitated by digestion. Plants, which convert solar energy to food by photosynthesis, are the primary food source. Animals that feed on plants are a source of protein and amino acids for human nourishment. With that perspective in mind, the status of the operation's profitability is the measuring indicator.

While seeking profit, there are various ways to take our product to market. The characteristics of various markets vary, as seen to the right. Major factors to consider are sales volume and price, risk and lifestyle preferences, labor requirements, and channel-specific cost. A marketing channel assessment exercise can be very beneficial to show what and where it would work, while seeking

"Markets,"

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	Farmers' Market	CSA	Farm Stand	U-Pick	Distributor	Grocery	Restaurant
Risks	Low customer turn-out, price competition, leftover unsold product.	Farmers' commitment up-front, customers share the risk.	Low customer turn-out.	Low customer turn-out. Weather. People on the farm.	Distributors "call the shots." Inconsistent orders, buyer back-out.	Inconsistent orders, buyer back-out.	Unpaid debts, buyer back-out. Can be slow to pay.
Prices & Profit	Prices vary. Can be highest among the channels. Labor costs relatively high.	Price is similar to wholesale, however, profit is generally higher.	Prices vary, but high profit potential. Location is a big factor in price.	Prices vary, high profit potential. Location is a big factor in price.	Price is low. Producer is a "price taker." Wholesale prices are generally low.	Price is low. Producer is a "price taker." Wholesale prices are generally low.	Prices vary. Usually higher than other wholesale prices.
Volume	Varies with market. Low to medium.	High: It is possible to "move" all the produce harvested.	Medium to low: location and competition dependent.	Medium to low: location and competition dependent.	High	High to variable.	Variable, usually small.
Level of Marketing Management Required	High: Many hours dedicated to selling. Most markets run 3-5 hours/day.	High: Must sell memberships & facilitate weekly share pick-ups. Less post-harvest work.	Variable: Ranges from unstaffed honor system to staffed stores.	Variable: Ranges from unstaffed honor system to staff supervision. Must advertise.	Low: Relatively quick & easy for volume sold. Must meet packing standards.	Low: Relatively quick & easy for volume sold. Must meet packing standards.	Variable: A high level of service for the volume sold.
Associated Costs	Market fees, equipment, travel, hired labor.	Packaging materials, advertising, brochures.	Road side signs and other advertising. Sales staff is optional.	Road side signs and other advertising. Sales staff is optional.	Washing, cooling & packing equipment for high volumes. Delivery costs.	Washing, cooling & packing equipment for high volumes. Delivery costs.	Washing, cooling & packing equipment for high volumes. Delivery costs.
Farmer Stress	Low: "Show up or don't show up."	Low to medium. Must meet customer expectations weekly.	Variable: Depending on overhead & scale.	Low	High: Distributors cited as highest stress customers.	Medium to high.	Medium to high.

2024/25 PURCHASING CHALLENGES

by Jim Ward & Matt Schoder

As we rapidly head to the close of 2024, we cannot help but hear the “noise” in the marketplace. A tight election, political instability in the Middle East and Asia, shipping challenges, and extreme weather events hitting our southern states. All of these items make the current raw material landscape a bit challenging and unpredictable. As we approached the 2024/25 raw material purchasing season, we had three main goals: secure the most competitive price possible, ensure that all raw materials can be delivered to our facility promptly, and most importantly, we cannot compromise the quality of our product. One thing we have learned over seventy years of being in business is when Growers ships from our facility, we are 100% sure that our product meets all of our quality specs and is safe to sell to the customer and consumer.

Matt Schoder, Asa, and I have worked together for the last few years on the raw material purchasing project. It is a large expense for us, very time-consuming, and at times particularly challenging. Our focus has always been on treating our suppliers in the same honest way that we would like to be treated as a company. We are transparent with our bids, we reach out to every winner and “loser” and explain our decision, letting each know that we will give them the opportunity to potentially earn our business in the future.

This year was a bit different, with the aforementioned “noise” in the market. We knew that it would be challenging to meet our three key criteria. Fortunately, we have a few things working in our favor. The DAP market has become exceedingly difficult and with almost all product coming from China and Russia, it is a challenging raw material to source. Thankfully, we have a strong relationship with a key supplier who sources all their product from Mexico and stores their product in Chicago. Their sales representative has been to our facility, knows us well, and as a result, we were able to secure the product at a favorable price with a minimized delivery risk for the upcoming season.

One thing we failed to mention is we ask all companies who bid to hold their pricing firm for the entire season. As you well know, raising the price mid-year makes it incredibly challenging to close sales. This is not popular with suppliers, but we are very upfront that this is necessary if they would like to earn our business.

After “round one” of the bidding, we selected the top three suppliers in each raw material category and asked them to submit their final bid in two weeks. We also asked each of those companies to visit our facility during this time, in person accompanied by a manager, or have a Teams meeting with our team. We do this to answer any questions they may have, and confirm volumes and delivery dates, but we primarily do it to let each of these companies hear our “story.” I learned years ago that having a decision-maker in the room is often critical to being able to come to an agreement not only on price, but also the terms of the agreement.

Another point is that our supplier like hearing that our best days are ahead. We have a strong sales team, and we are adding employees in key areas to assist our sales team. We discuss that we are building a new facility and we have a management team that is invested in the future.

One of my favorite times in this process is when a supplier mentions having visited our facility years ago to meet with Joe Henry (my uncle). It is the best, as I know he made them sit through many OSU football and sailing stories, and then would squeeze them professionally for the best price possible. If they met Joe, I know the odds are in our favor.

After the first round of bidding was complete, it looked like a 2-3% price increase was in play. We knew this could be a challenge for our sales rep team. We made sure we mentioned this in every second-round meeting, and the importance of supporting our sales team and farmers is key to our success. I know Matt and Asa got tired of hearing my pitch to all these companies, but the message was clear: we just can't raise our price this year, and if you would like to partner with Growers, you are going to need to come in with your best offer in hand, and be able to deliver the product timely.

When the final numbers were in, we were able to lower the price by 1.5% for this season. We heard two comments from nearly every supplier: “I can't believe our margin is this tight, but we want to earn your business this year,” “We had to have multiple internal meetings to gain the approval to hold your pricing firm for the entire season, as this is something we rarely do.” Joe would be proud!

It is a lot of work for us, but we are happy to do it. Our mission at Growers, as it has always been is to support our sales team and farmers, and to never take a shortcut in quality. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions, please look to us for support if ever needed, and please know that the Growers “family” is as committed as ever to serving you and our customers. ■

“Markets,” continued from page 2

to capture more margin/profit for the farm. When comparing economics, we can see that a well-run, direct-marketed CSA vegetable farm will not keep a crop around if it does not generate in excess of 10-15k per acre, with the high-end crops generating over 30k. This varies depending on location and management. Livestock operations directly marketed are easily over 5k per acre. It must be noted that these numbers are in gross revenue dollars per acre. Meanwhile, commodity corn in the current market would struggle to generate \$900 per acre. Certainly, lots of operations in our network have been producing one item or another for many years and doing an excellent job at that.

As family dynasties or the agricultural industry look to entice the next generation back to the farm, increased revenue definitely helps this opportunistic phase. The locavore or regenerative food supply-searching shopper is looking intently for a farmer to trust and count on. Higher value crops or market diversification are an excellent means to facilitate this increased revenue and continue the farm legacy.

Taking the plunge into the unknown of direct markets does not come without risks, be they apparent or real. The gains can be substantial, and some have proven to be quite successful in taking their products either directly to the consumer or adding a processing step to command more value in the sale. The biggest variable in efforts and cost when direct marketing is how much time and money you invest into advertising and gathering customers, whether through hard printed items, in person marketing, or online tools. It is worth taking some time to review data* and use it to assess your farm's market potential. We at Growers are always willing to discuss topics such as this. Feel free to call anytime, and we'll have the answer or gladly get it and get back to you. In the meantime, try a market evaluation and see what you think! ■

* *The Guide to Marketing Channel Assessment: How to Sell Through Wholesale and Direct Marketing Channels* is published by Cornell (University) Small Farms Program. The 38-page guide is available for free download at <https://hdl.handle.net/1813/40260>

DEAR VALUED CUSTOMER

We're here to stay! As many of you know, Growers Mineral, Corp. has received the Fertilizer Production Program Expansion grant, enabling us to build a brand-new facility just north of our current location. We anticipate being starting to move in by the end of 2025. Operating out of a 120 year-old building has brought its challenges, and finding workers for our labor-intensive production has been difficult. The new facility will be more efficient,

less labor-intensive, and will offer increased storage, enabling us to better control raw material prices. Rest assured, our new facility will continue to manufacture the same product and uphold the high-quality standards you've trusted for nearly 70 years. Thank you for choosing us for your fertilizer needs. We remain committed to delivering top-quality products and services.

Warm regards,
Russell and Asa Bobel
Third Generation Owners

New Beginnings

Honoring Our Roots—Building our Future

"Sweet Corn," continued from page 1

hand with several local high school kids that help out each year. All of their sweet corn is picked by hand and put in sacks, and then sent to the stands and some local grocery stores.

Once our field walk was completed, Keith asked if we would like to take a few samples home to share with friends and family. Of course our answer was yes. We then proceeded to pick a full sack load. Boy, were we and our family and friends in for a special treat! A sweet, sweet treat!

The Janson family has been in the sweet corn business for over 30 years and was recently named 2023 Morrison County Farm Family of the Year. The sweet corn is second to none. One of the benefits of our travels in our thirty-five states and two Canadian provinces coverage area is experiencing the wonderful Growers Mineral Solution program grown food, especially the sweet corn.

After walking the fields and witnessing the harvest in action, we headed back to the main farm. As we pulled in, we saw six or seven kids loading up the large sacks of sweet corn into a pick-up. From there it heads to the stands for the day's sales. They also send some of the sweet corn to local grocery stores, but most is sold through their stands. A few years ago, all their sweet corn was sold to local grocery stores and other retailers at a low margin, not leaving much room for error or a harsh weather year to make some sort of return on their investment. Today, most of their sweet corn is sold through the stands at around \$9 per dozen! They control the distribution and return on investment, not the retailer.

The secret to the Janson's unbelievable sweet corn is hard work, smart farming, a profitable distribution plan, and the Growers Mineral Program, applying high calcium and using Growers Mineral Solution for fertility. It has been a recipe for success and the best sweet corn around! If you're in the Morrison County area around summertime, stop by a Janson stand for a dozen of the best sweet corn you will ever taste. Enjoy! ■



Local kids loading sweet corn sacks at Janson Farm.



Both seed shoots are heading for the soil surface as the root heads toward the soil. Both seed roots chart a path towards the 2x2 application of GMS. Both seeds also received an In-Furrow application of GMS.

"GMS 2x2," continued from page 2

- b. The presence of volatile MeJA triggers and enforces the formation of biofilms in bacteria situated at a distance from the plant roots;
- c. These bacteria in the biofilm release a different set of volatile compounds that can boost plant growth by up to 30%.

One conclusion from this research paper is that "plants can't talk like us, but they have their elegant ways of conversing over long distances. VOC mediated communication between plants and microbes in the rhizosphere spans the distance, orchestrating nature's harmonious collaboration." ■