

International Sales Director at Sukup Mfg. Co., John Bowes is currently based at the Sukup Europe/Dan Corn facility in Hedensted, Denmark. From there he assists leadership with those efforts as well as maintaining his role as International Sales Director. He is constantly working on dealer development globally and travels approximately 50 percent of the time. For the past few years, Sukup Manufacturing Co. has established dealers in the countries of India, South Africa, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Japan and Indonesia while growing global market share in Europe, Canada and Mexico. An ongoing project now is 12 each of 5,000 metric ton silos for wheat in the Philippines, which is being handled by an experienced Sukup dealer located in that country.

How did you come to occupy your current position at Sukup and what relevant experience did you possess concerning grain storage?

I was previously the president for Behlen International so when I joined Sukup eight years ago, I had the specific experience necessary to transfer suitably into my role here.

What makes Sukup unique?

Being part of a family business, you're never far from decision-making, and what this means for a customer is that they are taken great care of because ultimately, Sukup's family name is on their products. As a family business, there is a family ethos that runs throughout the structure and mentality of the business. We're certainly seeing a second generation with Steve and Charles and now their sons and daughters are also in the business including Emily, Steve's daughter who is the company's corporate attorney. So we're seeing some very promising synergies between generations.

Given the turbulent political year we've just had, what challenges does Sukup face and how might you overcome these?

Well one thing Sukup has is total product offerings, so they don't concentrate on just one product allowing them to work through the kind of peaks and valleys compared to if you were just to have a single product line. For example, if grain storage is down, material handling might still be up – millwrights still need to upgrade and do their conveying and so on. Significantly, the market is taking us in certain directions just because of the growth of feed and food mills globally in general, but especially in Asia and developing countries. So it is exciting for us to see tremendous potential and growth in new international markets.

Current buzzwords of the industry include 'sustainability' and 'efficiency' – how does Sukup incorporate these values/industry demands into its business strategy?

One of Sukup's primary strengths and advantages over other companies is that they want to make everything themselves. In other words, they don't do a lot of buy-outs because they know that if they make something, they're able to control the quality and availability. An example of this is gearboxes - whereas most companies buy them from other countries, we actually make our own.

What would you say is the most inspiring way to get younger generations more involved in, and excited by, the grain storage industry?

As an example, we work closely with Iowa State University offering internships and recruiting college students. When they become involved with the industry and our company, they get excited about the opportunities in working with a global company.

As an industry leader, how do you motivate your team and what advice might you give to someone starting out as a manager?

At Sukup we like to "hire" and promote from within our company when possible, giving our employees a lot of opportunity to grow and advance their careers. It's not so much a "corporate ladder", but an environment/culture encouraging learning and growth.

Sukup is well known for its leading innovation - can you elaborate on how Sukup has been offering innovative products since its inception?

Yes. We talk a lot about "solutions" at Sukup and that's because finding "solutions" is the heart of innovation, and innovation is the driving force behind every product we make. It is the principal our company was founded on. Eugene Sukup started the company over 50 years ago when he was trying to speed up the process of drying his shelled corn and solve the problem of spoilage in his bin. His first solution was to modify a stoker auger, which he then put in an electric drill and used it to stir his grain.

When his new product didn't succeed commercially, he went back to the drawing board and came up with a design for an automatic stirring machine, which he patented and the Stirway stirring machine was born. It's that same spirit of innovation that drives us today. It starts with listening to the feedback of our customers and dealers, determining the different issues and problems they are having, and adjusting our products or designing new ones to solve those issues and ultimately help our customers to become more profitable.

In reflecting on my achievements while at Sukup, they really boil down to Dealer and Customer development. It is a tremendous pleasure for me to represent the Sukup company and family, as I meet with prospects from around the globe. Dealers and customers soon after working with them come to realize their values of honesty, integrity and fairness as it pertains to all facets of their business. I have been successful establishing new business because of who they are and how they treat customers and employees.

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