

SUCCESS STORY

MINOT 2022



GREAT NORTHERN AG

PLAZA --- Since 1998, Great Northern Ag has been providing farmers with superior products and services both domestically and internationally.

Long-time family farmer, Mark Kok, founded the business as a seed retail company. Twenty years of growth and success later, they have expanded to a second facility in Bowman, ND. Great Northern Ag's focus is providing opportunities for growers in the region, selling hybrid seed varieties, as well as offering quality seed cleaning and processing of food grade pulse commodities. They also

provide packaging and shipping of pulses to both domestic and international markets.

Mark realized he wanted to start his own business when he was selling branded bagged and bulk seed on their farm. He shared that he discovered this is what he wanted to do when he, "Realized that vertical integration of the farming operation was more efficient than diversification into other endeavors."

What began as a two-person operation some two decades ago, has grown to have several employees in two locations and a

track record of success.

Something Mark likes best about being a business owner is the reward of sharing success with his family. He said, "I attribute our success to exceptional support from our long-term bank, lots of luck, and a passion for improving the options for farmers both financially and agronomically. Through the years the farming community has trusted us to handle their needs with superior products and service. They are the reason we exist."

Mark also began working with the ND SBDC program. Of course, like other businesses, through the success, Mark has had challenges. He noted that the biggest



Mark Kok

challenge to overcome was cash flowing exceptional growth.

“Great Northern Ag has grown from a small on farm seed operation, to a multimillion-dollar international company with a diverse product mix both in commodities and genetics,” said Mark.

While getting his college degree, Mark worked with the MN SBDC, so he was aware of the services and resources the organization could provide. Mark shared, “When I was trying to understand the cash flow required to maintain business growth and explain that to my lending agency, I reached out and took advantage of the services provided by the ND SBDC.” Through his advising sessions, he expected to get a clear outline of existing financials and where they needed to go. And that’s exactly what he got.



Mark has been able to meet with Mary Beth, Minot Center Director and as a result he had a better understanding of his business financials, which led to more access to capital “A great deal of the success of any business is understanding how and where the profits are made. The advice and work that Mary Beth contributed to our operation is as invaluable today as was the day we got it. We go and get a business review periodically and when our situation has changed.

We consider the ND SBDC and Mary Beth a very important part of our management needs.”

Great Northern Ag has been a client of the ND SBDC since 2005 with appointments in most years, demonstrating the value of the programs on-going services and support for existing businesses. From assistance

through growth phases of the business, to help with COVID disaster funding, and now as Mark looks to transition ownership to the next generation, the ND SBDC has been by his side.

“The fundamental part of managing a successful business is knowing how the financials reflect the needs of a business to be profitable and how to manage cash. Most small businesses focus on the main objective of the business and sideline the financials. Having someone that has experience in financials and is objective about how the business does, helps to outline the course that has to happen for the business to be successful.”

Mark’s advice to other entrepreneurs is, “Make sure you have the passion and financial backing to make it happen with a clear plan in place to guide you.”



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