

Dave Schultz – SRES

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to South Africa. A group of researchers are planting a research plot to evaluate how the crop will perform. They are using a specialized planter which provides precise control and data on seed spacing and placement. Would you believe, this planter comes from halfway around the globe in the middle of Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

Dave Schultz is general manager of Seed Research Equipment Solutions, the innovative Kansas company which is supplying these planters. Dave explained that Stacy Unruh and two other partners formed the company in 1999. Stacy had studied as an engineer at Colorado School of Mines and worked in manufacturing. He and his two partners saw a need for this specialized type of planting equipment.

They named the company Seed Research Equipment Solutions or SRES. "This is for companies that do seed research, and we've got the solutions," Dave said. The company is housed in South Hutchinson. Stacy Unruh eventually bought out the partners and he is sole owner today.

In 1999, the partners built a research plot planter and took it to a trade show in Chicago. They made one sale: To Pioneer Seed Company, for test-planting sunflowers in Minnesota.

In 2000, they built another planter which could demonstrate the capabilities of the equipment. "We did (demonstrations) for anyone that would listen," said the company website. Demand started to grow for these planters, and so did the company. By 2003, the company had more than doubled from the original three founders to seven full time employees.

SRES continued to innovate through the years. In 2005, the company developed a new control system and sold its first mini seed planter. In 2008, SRES introduced the Runabout Planter, which was a small planter aimed at the vegetable market and specialty crops such as peanuts. The company also introduced a field layout system using Global Positioning System data which is credited with changing the industry.

Dave Schultz came on board as general manager in 2010, the same year that a Step 4 control system was introduced to integrate the planter operations with GPS. Today the company has grown to employ 20 people.

SRES four row planters provide the specialized controls and data which are vital for those doing agronomic research in the field. These planters have accompanying software for researchers to use.

"Researchers need to know exactly how and where that seed is planted," Dave said. "Our system can tell them within inches. Our Step 4 control system lets them do a field layout with a program in their office before they ever go to the field," he said. "Our applications will overlay each other so you can evaluate spraying, insecticide, inoculants, or whatever, plus the harvest to tie in the yield side.

"We want to be a one-stop shop," Dave said. "Companies can use our software system from start to finish."

These planters have gone to universities (such as K-State) and private research facilities from coast to coast and around the world, to such places as South Africa, China,

Australia, India, Egypt, Thailand, and more. “By using these planters overseas and in the U.S., companies can get results from two planting seasons in a single year,” Dave said. “They could test drought resistant corn in South Africa and then test it again here.”

What has been the key to such global success? “Stacy Unruh is a true visionary,” Dave said. “He’s a believer in keeping things simple, but he really listens to our customer base and makes it happen.” Stacy himself lives at the rural community of Yoder, population 194 people. Now, that’s rural. It is exciting to find a rural entrepreneur who is leading this global effort.

“We’re on the starting side of feeding the world,” Dave Schultz said. For more information, go to www.sresweb.com.

It’s time to leave South Africa, where researchers are using a special planter designed and built in South Hutchinson, Kansas. We commend Stacy Unruh, Dave Schultz, and all those involved with Seed Research Equipment Solutions for making a difference with global entrepreneurship. They are planting the seeds of research to help feed a growing planet.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.