



A Business Built on Service for Over Two Decades



Les & Carol Hopkins, Owners of Great Bend Farm Equipment

The decades-long success of Great Bend Farm Equipment (GBFE) is an illustration of man and machine combining their talents and capabilities to provide quality products and service to customers. “Man” represents GBFE employees and “machine” refers to their products on the farm and around the yard. The John Deere dealer is located just off U.S. 281, 2-and-a-half miles south of 10th and Main.

GBFE President Les Hopkins could talk quality machinery and agriculture all day but when it comes to explaining the company’s success, he credits his employees. “My service shop is what makes this business,” Hopkins said. “They believe in what they are doing and know how to do it. I guess this is true in any business. Service is it. That is what it all comes down to and that is what we try to do here – give good, honest service at a fair price.

“There was just a guy in here,” Hopkins continued. “He said we are the best service department in the country. Our employees have longevity, and they are people with the intelligence to handle concerns with electrical and mechanical issues, as well as GPS.”

In fact, local service employees receive hands-on training at the John Deere Training Center in Wichita, and a few of the young technicians graduated from the John Deere Ag-Tech programs in Garden City and Milford, Neb. This is where they learn not only about the nuts and bolts but also the whiz-bang, high-tech components of modern farm equipment.

Precision farming is “where it is at now,” Hopkins said. “You don’t steer the tractor; it steers itself off a satellite. If you are planting corn, that planter works off a satellite. It controls what you put into the ground. Plus, it will shut itself off so you don’t plant over what you have already planted. This saves time and money.”

Hopkins acknowledged that some farmers were resistant to the new technology at first “but now they demand it, especially the younger generation.”

The company president learned the ins and outs of farm-machinery dealerships during his long career in the industry. About 20 years ago, he came to Great Bend from Garden City; he operated three CASE IH dealerships in southwest Kansas. “I had a rapport with some John Deere people and they wanted me to buy a dealership,” he said. “This is one of those things you just fall into.”



In 1993 Hopkins and his business partner, Cecil O’Brate of Garden City, bought GBFE, the former Taylor Equipment at the same location. They remain co-owners.

In those early days there were 13 employees; today the total is 32. “All of us pride ourselves on getting to the customer quickly, diagnosing the problem and fixing the problem,” Hopkins commented. “We guarantee all our work for a whole year. We can do that because of the employees.”

The other type of “machine” that comes into play is the computer. “I hate the computer with a passion,” Hopkins laughed. “But we are what we are because of it.”

He explained that GBFE sells new machinery only in its five-county service area but the computer allows used-machinery sales all over the United States and some foreign countries. “This has helped with the feast and famine of farming,” he said, noting GBFE’s territory entails Barton, Pawnee, Stafford, Rush and Russell counties.

The business, which has expanded the original building by more than 30,000 square feet and added a second building for the lawn equipment, collaborates with other John Deere dealers to find the right part and get it

into the hands of the farmer. That pesky computer comes in handy here too.

Some maintenance and repair work is done at the shop, but GBFE also operates eight mobile units that travel to the field. However, the farm field isn’t the only destination for GBFE’s products; its lawn and garden department for homes and businesses has been growing in recent years. “Lawn and garden has become successful because of Everett Royer,” Hopkins said. “I had to get psyched up to get into that part of the business. I had to change my way of thinking.”

Royer, marketing manager, noted that the residential and non-ag business markets were there waiting to be tapped. And GBFE had the capability to cater to this niche. “Les put the right people in place,” Royer commented. “And now we have a full line of lawn and garden equipment.”

The product line includes everything from trimmers to zero-turn-radius mowers to Gator utility vehicles. The dealership also recently added Honda products to the mix.

All these factors add up to GBFE being part of John Deere’s success. “John Deere is the best in the farm equipment industry – the best merchandiser of equipment there is,” Hopkins said. “We have built on to the shop three times. It all gets back to the dealership and service.”

