

LITTLE CHANGES, BIG RESULTS

Standardize and document the processes on your farm for improved efficiency

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Where would your farm be tomorrow if you were hit by a bus? Your computer crashed? Or your bookkeeper ran off with the hired man? Do you have people and documented processes in place to keep your operation running without a blip?

Dick Wittman, an Idaho farmer and consultant, says farmers need to document standard operating procedures (SOPs) to handle these types of situations, as well as improve efficiency and safety on your farm.

Process management is basically looking at repetitive tasks on your farm, identifying the best way to do them and then documenting that

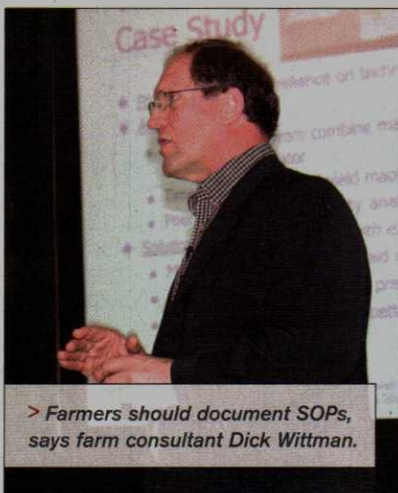


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process, he says. Then no matter who is assigned a task, he or she can perform the task in a consistent manner. It's not exciting, but it can

help you avoid a catastrophe, mistake or safety incident, he explains.

Reliable Results. Gregg Halverson, a North Dakota potato producer, knows all about SOPs. His operation, Black Gold Farms, comprises 11 farms in 11 states, which produce peanuts, sweet potatoes and potatoes for chips and table stock. Because his products are purchased by food companies, they must deliver consistent results. "Customers don't care if it rains or the wind blows," Halverson says. "They want their potatoes delivered when we say we're going to deliver them."

To do so, Black Gold Farms has extensive SOPs, which enable each location to replicate systems that are performed at the other locations. These SOPs range from production methods to energy usage to water management.

"He has mastered the concept of process improvement," Wittman says of Halverson. "He looks at everything that moves and figures out how to do it more efficiently. Then they replicate an optimally efficient process over and over."

Wittman says for any business there should be SOPs for office functions, equipment operations, fuel storage, herd health, worker safety guidelines and cell phone usage, just to name a few. ■

START PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

Determining and implementing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for your farm is not an

exciting task, but the process will help you excel, says Dick Wittman, an Idaho farmer and farm consultant. He recommends the following tips.

- Form an in-house team, with an outside facilitator, to lead the charge. Make sure someone officially owns this task for your operation.
- Identify business areas that might benefit from standardizing processes.
- Review any legislation and regulatory requirements that might affect your operation. Attend trainings on these topics, as needed.
- Visit with peers who have implemented similar SOPs, best management practices (BMPs) or good agricultural practices (GAPs).
- Determine if you need to work with any auditing or certifying organizations to implement your processes.
- Clearly document how tasks are supposed to be performed. Have the employees in your operation who commonly perform these tasks contribute to documenting and updating SOPs.
- Find the best place to house your documented processes, where you and your employees can easily find them.
- Once your SOPs, BMPs and GAPs are in place, regularly audit or evaluate the processes and their results. Incentivize improved processes and penalize non-compliance.

Identify areas of your business that need SOPs by downloading a worksheet provided by Dick Wittman at www.TopProducer-Online.com/process_improvement