

South American trip gives global perspective on ag

Mustang Seeds visits GDM

By MARY GALES ASKREN

Terry Schultz, CEO of Mustang Seeds in Madison, was enjoying the warmth of a tropical climate in late January while his customers back home were enduring yet another South Dakota winter. However, they can be comforted to know he was — as ever — working on their behalf.

Schultz had traveled to Brazil and Argentina with a coterie of ag producers and Mustang sales representatives to get a firsthand look at ag production there and to see what GDM, Mustang Seeds' business partner, is doing in research laboratories.

"For me to see global agriculture was just an amazing thing," he said upon returning.

Mustang Seeds entered into a business partnership with GDM, a company based in Argentina, last year primarily to gain access to new product lines which are being developed in GDM laboratories. They are using a technology known as gene editing.

"With gene editing, you take a specific DNA out of the plant to enhance it or make it express an enhanced trait," Schultz explained.

Broadly speaking, GECs (genome edited crops) differ from GMOs

(genetically modified organisms) — or what Schultz prefers to call "genetically enhanced" — in the approach used. GECs replicate conventional breeding methods, but do so in a more precise and efficient manner. GMOs obtain their results by incorporating DNA from

laboratories but also had the opportunity to talk with researchers. He felt this was important because his managers, sales staff and sale representatives will be talking to their customers about the new product lines that are being introduced this year. The producers, too, can take word of what

research lab, Schultz said they had the opportunity to see what farming looks like in Argentina and Brazil. Most impressive was the scale of the operations.

In Lucas do Rio Verde, they visited a 150,000-hectare farm — approximately 370,000 acres — that employed 600

In comparing what he saw there to what he knows about agriculture in the United States, Schultz cited the availability of labor as an advantage in South America. The ability to raise two crops annually is also an advantage.

"We got to go to the field where they were combining soybeans," Schultz said. "They were planting right behind the combine."

However, South America doesn't have the infrastructure in place to easily get the grain to market, and they don't have the storage capacity to hold the grain. The farm they visited relied on truckers to get their grain 1,200 miles to market.

In addition, farm equipment must be shipped in, which means equipment costs are higher. Too, while they can grow two crops annually in South America, when they rotate the crops, their corn production is lower than in the United States.

The U.S. trade war with China gave South America an advantage with that market, and the collapsing currency in both Argentina and Brazil similarly gives their farmers an advantage. However, Schultz still has faith in the American farmer.

"The U.S. is still in the lead with efficiency and productivity," he said.

He believes that Mustang Seeds has a role to play in

this and will be doing so in the future with the products they introduce as a result of the GDM partnership. He explained that after the gene editing is done, they do a number of grow-outs to ensure a superior product.

"The ones that are making it through the screening process are superior in yield," Schultz said.

He expects to take a group to South America annually in order to help area producers and Mustang staff better understand both the new products and how they are developed in labs and greenhouses. He, personally, felt it was a valuable experience.

"It gave me even more confidence in our joint venture and our ability to bring topnotch products forward in years to come," Schultz said.



TERRY SCHULTZ (left), CEO of Mustang Seed, and Ignacio Bartolome, GDM's business manager for the U.S. and Canada, inspect a field of soybeans in Argentina on a trip that Schultz made to South America in January. (submitted photo)

other organisms.

"Things look very promising in gene editing because they are naturally selecting from inside the plant," Schultz said, which could lead to a healthier food source.

Schultz and the 11-person group with which he traveled not only saw firsthand what is happening in GDM's research

they saw back to their communities.

"These people on the research side were interested in our group, our farmers," Schultz said. "Some of the plant breeders made friends with our farmers and they continue to keep in contact with them."

In addition to seeing what GDM is doing in the

workers. It had an office and training facility that rivaled a major American business. Farms like these are America's primary competitor on the world market, according to Schultz.

"The farmers were very open about their profitability and about explaining how things work," he said.


 The advertisement features the "BANkeasy" logo in a green box at the top. Below it is the logo for "First Bank & Trust", which includes a stylized green "F" and the text "First Bank & Trust". At the bottom, it displays the FDIC logo and the contact information "800.843.1552 WWW.BANKEASY.COM".