Keeping up with the changing trends in agricultural technology and customer needs can be challenging, as Grainland Coop's agronomy manager Roger Gordon can attest.

In the spring of 2008, the Coop's liquid fertilizer plant, located northeast of Holyoke, broke down, causing both Gordon and Grainland as a whole, to reevaluate the fertilizer dept. and its plant system. The result is a new, full-service fertilizer plant system that will increase the speed and efficiency with which farmers receive their fertilizers.

As Gordon explained it, the fertilizer dept. was located at the west end of the Holyoke Grainland elevators until the need for more space prompted the company to move it to its current location in 1996. The site continued to develop its liquid fertilizer plant until 1998, when it became fully operational.

Ten years ago, the liquid fertilizer facility worked very well for the demands of that time. According to Gordon, however, since then, customers have acquired much larger trucks and planting windows have shrunk, increasing the demand for fertilizer and the need for speed.

Finding the best way to develop the facility so it could better meet the needs of Grainland's customers was important to the dept., said Gordon. "After identifying who we considered the top two fluid consulting companies in the country, we had them assess the status of the facilities and make recommendations based on our goals."

Dan Wilkening, who has been with Grainland over 25 years, also helped with the design of the facility.

The former plant was computer-controlled and had two blending systems that could not operate independently. A customer had to wait for the other system to be cycled through before using it. The new facility is now made up of three separate systems that run independently of each other.

The result, said Gordon, is a dramatic cut on wait times and a more complete blending of fertilizer recipes, with fewer opportunities for human error.

All bays can now fill to full capacity as well; before only one bay could do this and the other two had set limits. Gordon added inbound trucks shouldn't interfere as much with traffic around the fertilizer plant as they have in the past. They have been moved to a separate area of the site.

All of this has been done to make the whole experience more convenient for Grainland's customers. "We want them to feel they are getting exactly what they want from us," said Gordon, "and at the same time keep things moving quickly for them."