

TRIED & TRUE

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WINTER 2022

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FRATCO

To Tried & True Readers,

Although I am an optimist and choose to focus on the silver linings of 2021, I suspect I'm not the only one who was more than ready to welcome 2022. We accomplished a lot together last year, and next year looks just as bright. Our Fratco family and customers are moving resin-shaped mountains, helping farmers and businesses solve their drainage needs and continuing to support one another through an industry-wide roller coaster of supply shifts. As we settle into 2022, let's keep that positive momentum going by setting goals that push us to do great things while serving others.

Ag-tech innovation is experiencing a period of growth like never before. Take some time to read our editorial "iFarm" and learn how robotics is making a difference for growers while investors are clamoring to be a part of it. I hope you'll also read our editorial about the art of listening to others and how it can enhance your life personally and professionally.

Thank you for trusting our team to bring you the best pipe in the industry. We know you have a choice when it comes to drainage and we're grateful you continually choose Fratco. I appreciate your investment in us because we are always invested in you—our customers. I hope you and your family had a blessed holiday season, and we wish you the best in 2022.

Please enjoy this issue of *Tried & True*.

Sincerely,



Chris Overmyer
President and CEO

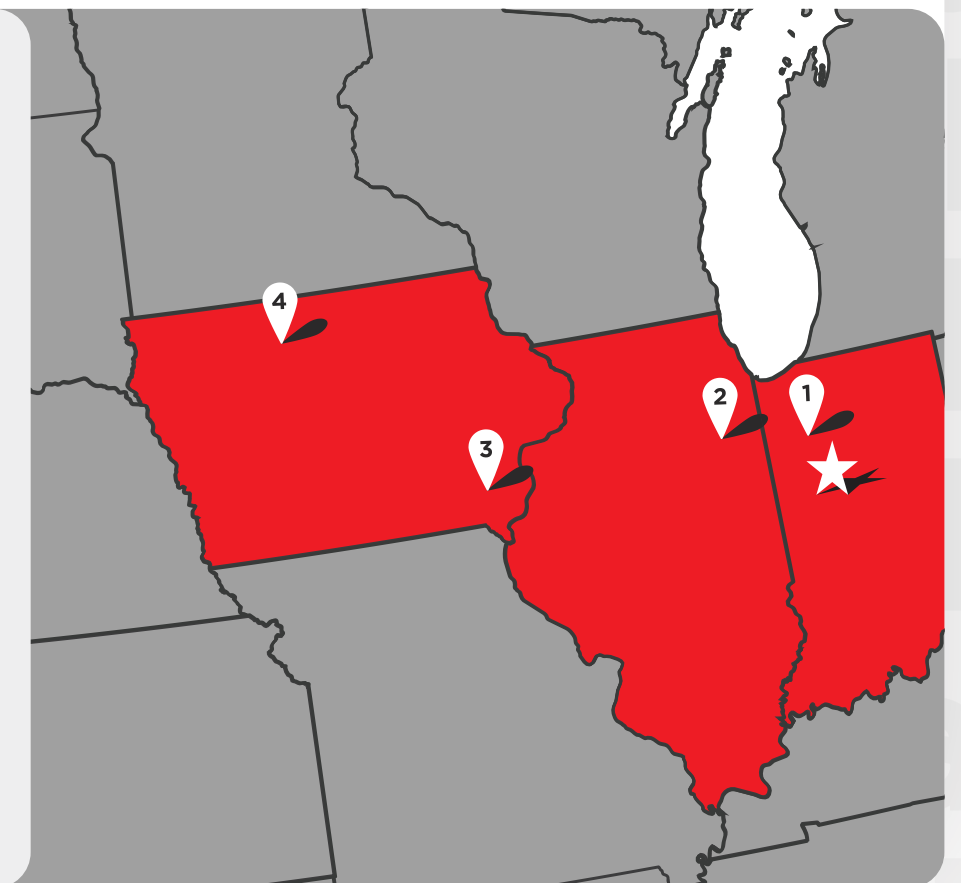
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Locations

- 1** **Francesville Location**
4385 S. 1450 W.
P.O. Box 368
Francesville, IN 47946
- 2** **St. Anne Location**
499 S. Oak St.
St. Anne, IL 60964
- 3** **Mt. Pleasant Location**
1600 W. Washington St.
Mt. Pleasant, IA 52641
- 4** **Algona Location**
2502 E. Poplar St.
Algona, IA 50511
- ★** **Corporate Office**
105 W. Broadway St.
Monticello, IN 47960



UPCOMING 2022 TRADE SHOW SCHEDULE

February
1-3

Iowa Ag Expo
Des Moines, IA

February
2-5

Illinois LICA Convention
Ft. Wayne, IN

February
15-19

National LICA Winter Convention
Des Moines, IA

February
23-24

Missouri LICA Drainage Contractor Workshop
Louisville, KY

February
25

Missouri LICA Landowner Drainage Workshop
Louisville, KY

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MEET SHANE SOLBERG

ALGONA PLANT MANAGER



When you walk onto the floor at Fratco's plant in Algona, Iowa, there's a good chance you won't find Plant Manager Shane Solberg in his office. Instead, he's likely on the line lending a hand. "I get in trouble with my boss a lot, because I'm a worker. I'll just go out there and do it," Solberg admits with a laugh.

He may be half-joking, but it's this willingness to do whatever it takes and be a team player that's characterized Solberg's approach ever since joining the Fratco team a year ago. **"I'm building a team. I'm building a family. That's how I live my life. That's how I run my plant. I'm very connected with my coworkers,"** he says of his leadership role.

Starting as a shift supervisor, Solberg was tapped to manage plant operations just months into his new job. Beyond his day-to-day responsibilities of ensuring the plant is running smoothly and managing expectations, his broader directive is crafting a positive workplace culture. And he's already seeing the impact of that focus. "My role is clear in creating a good working environment. We're seeing the results of that with people coming from other plants in town. They're hearing that this is the place to work."

What makes Fratco such a great place to work? One reason is the opportunity to grow within the company. As Solberg puts it, **"Fratco's definitely a place where, if you're willing to put your head down, go to work and learn everything you can, they're going to take care of you."** There's a family atmosphere that makes working

here different, and it's something Shane makes sure is present in his daily conversations with employees. "I'm always checking in, especially if any of my employees have kids that are sick, or a family member that's been in the hospital. Whenever I see them, I'm checking in to see how their better half is doing or how their kids are doing. Little things like that."

This focus on family, life and work comes from the top down. It was one of the things that impressed Solberg when he interviewed for the role. After traveling to Indiana to meet with Fratco's owner and higher-ups, he knew he was in the right spot. "Normally, those meetings can be very nerve-racking, but this company, **from the top down, they are as advertised. They're salt of the earth, down to earth, good people.** There's a lot of lip service in companies when they say 'we care about our employees.' Well, I've seen firsthand that everyone here cares about everyone in the company."

Clearly the hard work, dedication and family atmosphere at Fratco lead to results with our customers. When asked why people choose Fratco, Solberg is quick to reply, "Fratco has made itself a reputation. It's going to be the highest quality when it leaves here, but if something's not right, we're going to make it right."



FEATURE STORY

FAMILY: THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

THE BANKS FAMILY

Stateline Tile

Stateline Tile is the definition of a thriving, close-knit family business. Owned by the Banks family, the company is operated by five of the six members, with no one person running the show. They've found that managing and making decisions together has been the key to their success so far and how they see themselves working in the future. That's why when an opportunity arose to work with Fratco, another family owned company, the perfect partnership was formed.

Westfield, Iowa, sits just 16 miles north of Sioux City, Iowa, where the borders of Iowa, South Dakota and Nebraska meet. Ten years ago, just outside of this small, one-stoplight town, the Banks family began producing pipe themselves. Starting with the purchase of used pipe manufacturing equipment, they didn't know exactly what business would look like. But with pipe in demand, and not always being in ready supply locally, customers started rolling in right away.

Soon after Stateline opened its doors, the Banks family worked out a deal to store some of Fratco's pipe at their yard. But that was just the beginning. They got to know each other through business over the years and then started talking about manufacturing. It became clear that with Fratco's business experience and size of operations, they could lend their manufacturing expertise to Stateline. For their part, Stateline could give Fratco increased production power and access to local customers.

So, they made a deal, and Stateline began manufacturing Fratco pipe. The result was an overnight increase in volume for the small, family-held business. On the manufacturing process, Kirk Banks says he's already seeing steady improvements working with Fratco, with more to come. "I think we always made really good tile, but Fratco knows how to make good tile more efficiently, with fewer components and maybe a little simpler."

Business is good, but it's not the reason the Banks wanted to work with Fratco. The real draw? Family, of course. When Kirk speaks about Fratco's family culture, "It just mirrors our philosophy," he says.

We operate as a family, and we feel like Fratco does too.

"We operate as a family, and we feel like Fratco does too. That was one of the main reasons that we even considered going into a partnership with them. It's really appealing."

In fact, it's so appealing that Kirk wouldn't do business any other way. "I can't imagine this being the case with another tile company. Fratco is the only one that could ever happen for us."

Having a front-row seat to the inner workings of Fratco gives Stateline a unique perspective on Fratco. "When you do a tour of their plant, you see

the efficiencies and innovations they've come up with. It's just a good company all the way around," Kirk says. And it's not just the plant Kirk has been impressed with. Fratco's vision, dedication to quality and commitment to treating customers right matters too. "Well, first of all, they make an excellent product," Kirk says, **"and they're very innovative, like when they pioneered FlexCorr dual-wall pipe. That alone shows you they want this business to grow and be more convenient for contractors and farmers. They're interested in making a product that lasts, and that is what matters to us."**

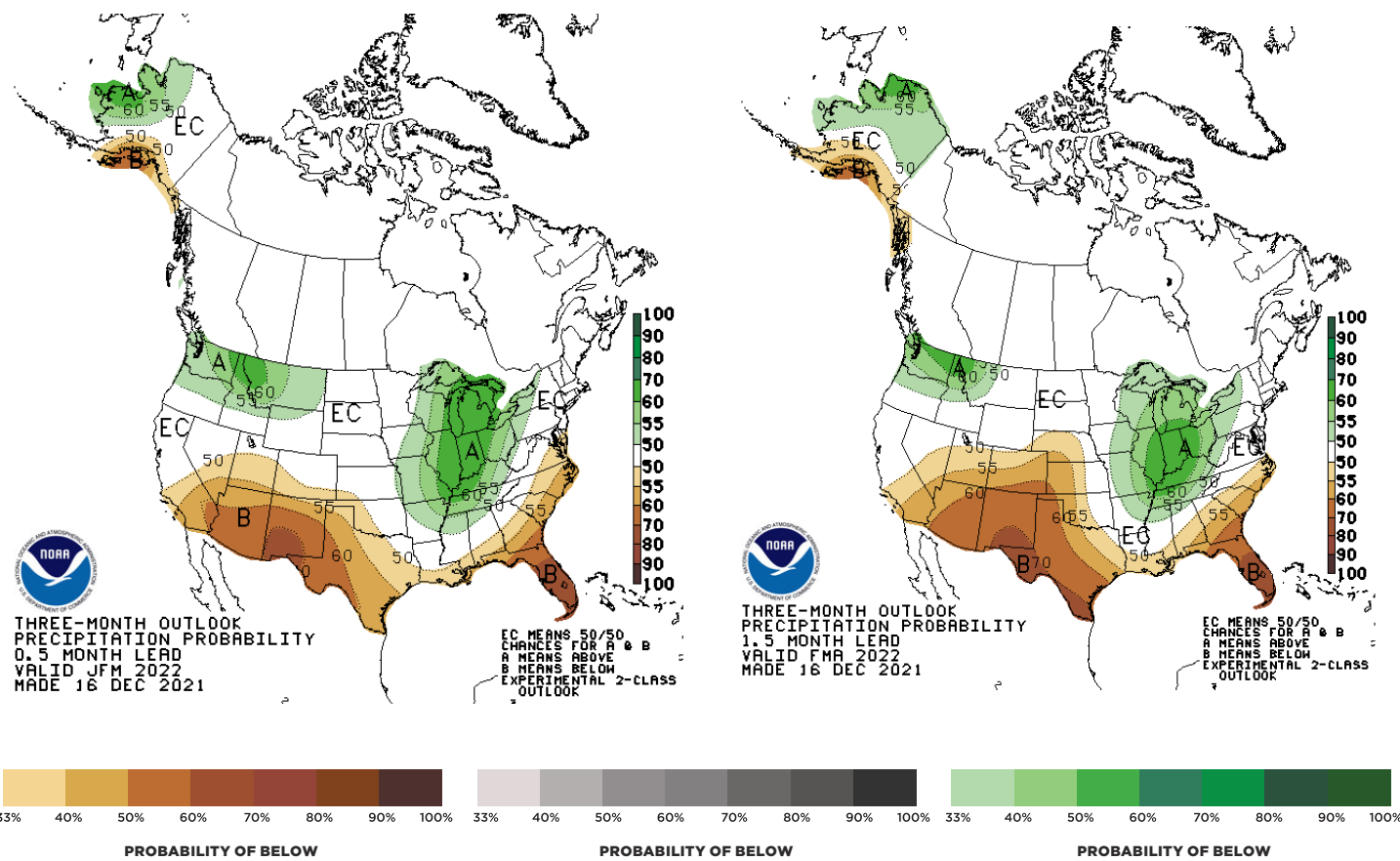
Of course, Kirk wouldn't just include himself, his business and the Fratco employees as family members. He says the family treatment is given to everyone Fratco works with. "You're not just a number with Fratco. If you're a customer, you also feel like you're part of the family."

PRECIPITATION OUTLOOK FROM THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

2022

JAN-MAR

FEB-APR



Nothing about the future is set in stone, and weather predictions are no exception. But in an industry where thorough preparation is fundamental, having an idea of what lies ahead can be the difference between business as usual and battling rain delays. Always keep an eye on daily and weekly weather outlooks, but also set yourself up for success by planning ahead through seasonal forecasts.

For the latest weather information, visit the National Weather Service's website.

www.noaa.gov

Industry News

Having access to up-to-date information is crucial for understanding how the industry evolves.

PLASTICS PIPE INSTITUTE CHEERS INFRASTRUCTURE ACT

The bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), H.R. 3684, was met with overwhelming support from PPI. David M. Fink, PPI President, noted on the passage of this act that "...our nation will soon see a concentration of forces at work to revitalize and expand our existing infrastructure. The Infrastructure Deal will invest \$55 billion to expand access to clean drinking water for households, businesses, schools and childcare centers across the country. Many communities will benefit from new HDPE water mains and HDPE or PEX water service lines because these materials are reliable, safe and efficient to install and provide zero-leakage to make sure no water is wasted."



To read Fink's complete statement, visit plasticpipe.org/common/Uploaded%20files/1-PPI/General%20Literature/Press%20Releases%20and%20Announcements/PPI%20Infrastructure%20Bill%20Support%20FINAL%20Dec%208%202021.pdf

PROTECTING PLASTIC PIPES AGAINST FREEZING

PPI has published a new technical note related to protecting plastic pressure piping materials against freezing. Although plastic piping materials are inherently better insulators of heat energy than traditional metal pipes, like steel and copper, there are situations where plastic pipe should be insulated to protect against the freezing of fluids inside, according to PPI.



To learn more, visit plasticpipe.org/tn-65

PPXXI EVENT

The Plastics Pipe Conference Association has announced their next event—PPXXI—will be hosted September 26-28, 2023, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. The presentations and papers delivered at the conference will embrace the technical and business developments in plastic pipe systems worldwide. Stay tuned for more details and events to come in 2022.



To view the resort where the PPXXI will be hosted, visit swandolphin.com

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:



The Art of Listening

WHY HEARING OTHERS SPEAK MATTERS

There are a million ways to invest in the family farm, whether through technology, machinery or staff. But there's one way that doesn't cost a dime and pays out dividends: listening. It's an art that most people haven't mastered, yet it is essential for a healthy farm and family.



THE LOST ART

Most people believe they're decent listeners. After all, they literally hear what people are saying to them and they do their best not to ignore them. However, it turns out that truly good listening isn't practiced by most people. Why? Because there's a huge chasm between hearing the words people say and listening and understanding what they're truly saying.

Human brains process thoughts at a rate far greater than people speak. So, even while hearing the words at a normal speed, the brain is doing countless other things because it has the time and capacity to do so. It's easy to get distracted by other concerns, get too focused on one thing the other person said or start crafting a response for when they're finished.

Or flip to the other side of the coin. When asked to think about the last time they felt truly heard, many people draw a blank. It's a rare occurrence for someone to not just hear the words we say, but to also echo them back, ask specific questions and communicate their understanding. Which means when it does happen, it means the world to us.

BRINGING IT HOME TO THE FARM

Family farms and family-owned businesses require a lot of verbal, informal communication. It's easy for the lines to be blurred between work and family life, and it can feel like there's mutual understanding between family members even when things aren't directly spoken.

The downside of this is that the same lack of separation between work and home can mean tensions from work spill into family life and vice versa. Plus, when family members have different roles within a family corporation, there can be a lot of unspoken conflict around roles and responsibilities.

That makes communication—and especially listening—critical to running a successful farm and ensuring everyone's on the same page.

[Continue Reading](#) ▶



THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE LISTENING

So what does it mean to listen well? Active listening is when you focus on what the other person is saying, then paraphrase what they said back to them. It may feel awkward at first, but it's an incredibly effective way to make people feel heard. It's important to not add any judgments or interpretations. Just restate the message and follow up with any relevant questions.

Remember that your brain is moving faster than the conversation. Though at first that fact can be a detriment to a conversation, when wielded to listen better, it can provide a huge advantage to the listener. Don't think about things beyond what's being said. Rather, try to understand where the speaker is coming from and the

bigger ideas they're trying to convey, then tailor your questions accordingly.

Sources: Family Farms Group, Michigan State University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, AgriLegacy, The Life Adventure and Harvard Business Review

MAKE COMMUNICATION A FAMILY AFFAIR

Aside from simply listening better, there are many helpful ways of encouraging good communication around the family farm.

- 1 SAY IT OUT LOUD**
Whether it's something someone did well or a concern about someone's work, it's far better to say it out loud rather than keep it hidden. People want to hear the good things people think about them, and burying a conflict only leads to resentment.
- 2 SCHEDULE MEETINGS**
It may seem unnecessary to hold formal meetings on a close-knit farm, but it's essential to making sure everyone is on the same page. Discuss what's happening that week, give updates on progress and resolve any issues that come up.
- 3 WRITE IT DOWN**
Verbal communication works for a lot of things. But for the most important policies, plans and procedures, make sure these are written down and made accessible to everyone. This ensures the entire team is explicitly informed and helps avoid arguments down the road.
- 4 MAKE TIME FOR BEING TOGETHER**
Especially during busy seasons, don't forget the importance of making time to simply enjoy one another as family. Consider having dinner together once a week and try to forget about the daily stressors of the farm for at least that one meal.
- 5 TALK ADULT-TO-ADULT**
It's easy to fall into the roles of parent, child or sibling when interacting with family. But it's critical to treat each other as adults first when a problem arises at the farm. The last thing that will help is bringing family roles and conflicts into the mix.

The benefits of active listening and good communication go well beyond interpersonal relationships. Productivity, efficiency, problem solving and conflict resolution will benefit everyone well into the future.

DID YOU KNOW?

WE HELP OUR EMPLOYEES DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

Life happens, right? Thanks to donations from generous friends of Fratco, we have established the Employee Support Fund to aid team members experiencing unexpected financial burdens. Fratco family members deserve our help during vulnerable times, and that's why we're here to help.

WE STAND BEHIND OUR PIPE AND OUR CUSTOMERS

To ensure your drainage runs smoothly, Fratco is here to help. From spec questions to installation guidelines, trust our team to be there when pipe arrives at your job site or if you need us down the road.



iFarm

How robots are changing ag's future

Farmers blasting weeds with pinpoint lasers? Precision planting drones? Farmhands running on solar power rather than morning joe? These aren't futuristic *Star Trek* episodes but rather today's ag-tech breakthroughs. After years of anticipation, robotics is taking a major leap into the ag workforce, making a critical difference for farmers and helping feed the planet.

WORK ANNIVERSARIES

Felicia Isaacs
4 years

Kenny Sifrit
1 year

Trent Watts
4 years

Cheryl Owens
30 years

Bernard Pollmeier
4 years

Jackie Sanchez
6 years

Bobby Howard
21 years

Mason Doyle
10 years

Angel Soto
3 years

Alex Carter
4 years

Jeff Webb
6 years

Katrina Pelsy
7 years

Shane Solberg
1 year

Adrianna Tiete
1 year

WELCOMING NEW HIRE

Shannon Price

WHAT ARE AG ROBOTS?

Ag robots consist of technology created to specifically help growers and producers. With a wide range of operational functions, these gadgets and automated gizmos can analyze tasks, sift through data then choose how to carry out the work in the most optimal way possible. These wondrous creations do many tasks while

saving the precious commodities of a grower's time and energy. Many ag-tech products are programmable, allowing them to grow and evolve with the ever-changing needs of their farm. Some take on repetitive, intense and physically demanding labor. Others are used for specialized jobs once reserved for those with a keenly trained eye—tasks like carefully

reaping produce, using every inch possible to plant and weed by hand. The trained eyes and skill set needed for these to-dos can now fall into the capable, robotic hands of artificial intelligence.

[Continue Reading](#) ▶



THE STARTUP RACE

For years, robots have filled various needs from customer service call centers to the automotive industry and beyond. Over the decades, enterprises have turned to engineering advancements for packaging, shipping, manufacturing and production lines. The events of 2020 opened a significant lane for the agricultural space to join the tech age. For years, automation had been underway within certain segments of the farming industry. The past two years have brought along a tipping point for progress, and ag welcomed venture capitalists into the arena with open arms.

In 2020, well-funded groups invested \$6.1 billion in US-based ag-tech startups, a 60% increase over 2019 numbers. That amount of money is even more jaw-dropping when compared to the dollar amount invested in ag-tech just ten years ago: \$332 million. Companies creating the trifecta of tech—robotics, computer-aided vision and automation—received the highest dollar amounts. These active ag-tech entrepreneurs saw an opportunity in farming innovation to ease long-standing challenges for grower efficiency, increased food production and a virtually untapped market. Between indoor vertical

farming and improved automation in any indoor or outdoor climate, the race is wide open for product development from AI software to predictive yield planning and beyond. Although farmers welcome ways to increase ROI, today's ag-tech products must solve the problems of today's farmers at a price point that makes sense now and in the long run.

THE PRODUCTS

The future of farming is nothing less than sophisticated. From drones that communicate with satellites

to field data followed by Wi-Fi-enabled moisture sensors, new tech is conserving water and making operations more green—something we at Fratco love to hear. For example, robots nimble enough to pluck heads of lettuce from fields or berries from stems leave produce intact and nothing behind. This equals better yields at the marketplace and less food waste: wins from every angle.

Ask a farmer what their perfect field looks like, and you'll probably hear the response "zero weeds." No-till farming is a popular way to care for soil, which usually means increased herbicide usage. Enter weed-pulling and laser robots. These machines can spot the difference between crops and invading roots, then dispose of what shouldn't be present without disturbing plant growth. No matter the tech or its function, these inventions assist farmers in completing tasks, meaning growers have less fatigue, more stamina to continue doing the job they love and the ability to bring their business into a new age.

THE ROADBLOCKS

Climate change, an exploding population, an aging ag workforce and labor shortages: these challenges are at critical levels in America and they will only continue to increase. That's why ag is ripe for automation disruption. Whatever product an ag-tech company dreams up and develops must enhance a current farm's workflow. Investing in robots that understand watering needs or act as an extra set of hands isn't prudent if the tech can't work with

crop packaging and distribution. The investment would be astronomical for larger farms to replace all ongoing processes. Small-to medium-sized farms are the perfect breeding grounds for new tech. They may not have the capital to invest in massive systems, but through partnerships with up-and-coming startups looking to cut their teeth in the ag-tech market, developers can prove their products are worthwhile by helping growers.

Farmers are known for thinking outside the box to solve problems. Startups are born because they see a current need. These similar thinkers coming together to solve real problems is a win for inventors and food producers alike. Ag-tech solutions allow growers to focus on their roles and spend more time where it makes sense for their business. And these up-and-coming companies have their working product in the field to woo more potential clients and investors.

Finding better ways to work smarter and not harder is what keeps our Fratco teams working hard to bring you pipe that lasts and works in tandem with the ag-tech products of today and tomorrow. From conserving water to helping you make smart decisions for your bottom line, you can trust us to continue innovating the industry we've loved for nearly 100 years.

Sources: The New York Times, Ecorobotix, Earth Sense, Carbon Robotics and Smithsonian Magazine



WORD SEARCH

Hey, Fratco friends, it's word search time! Find all the words in our list drawn from this issue's articles. Look for them forward, backward, diagonal, this way and that way. Enjoy, and best of luck!

I R E G A N I A R D R I E E
 R R O O I M W O C T A R F N
 L O O B O T A D T R U F L O
 I S P R O T T E L R N M E I
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LISTENING
 COMMUNICATION
 FAMILY
 iFARM
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FIELD
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 PIPE
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 WATER
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 FLEXCORR
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INSTRUCTIONS: Cut along the dotted line for 5x7 frames, or cut out the image for 4x6 frames.



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