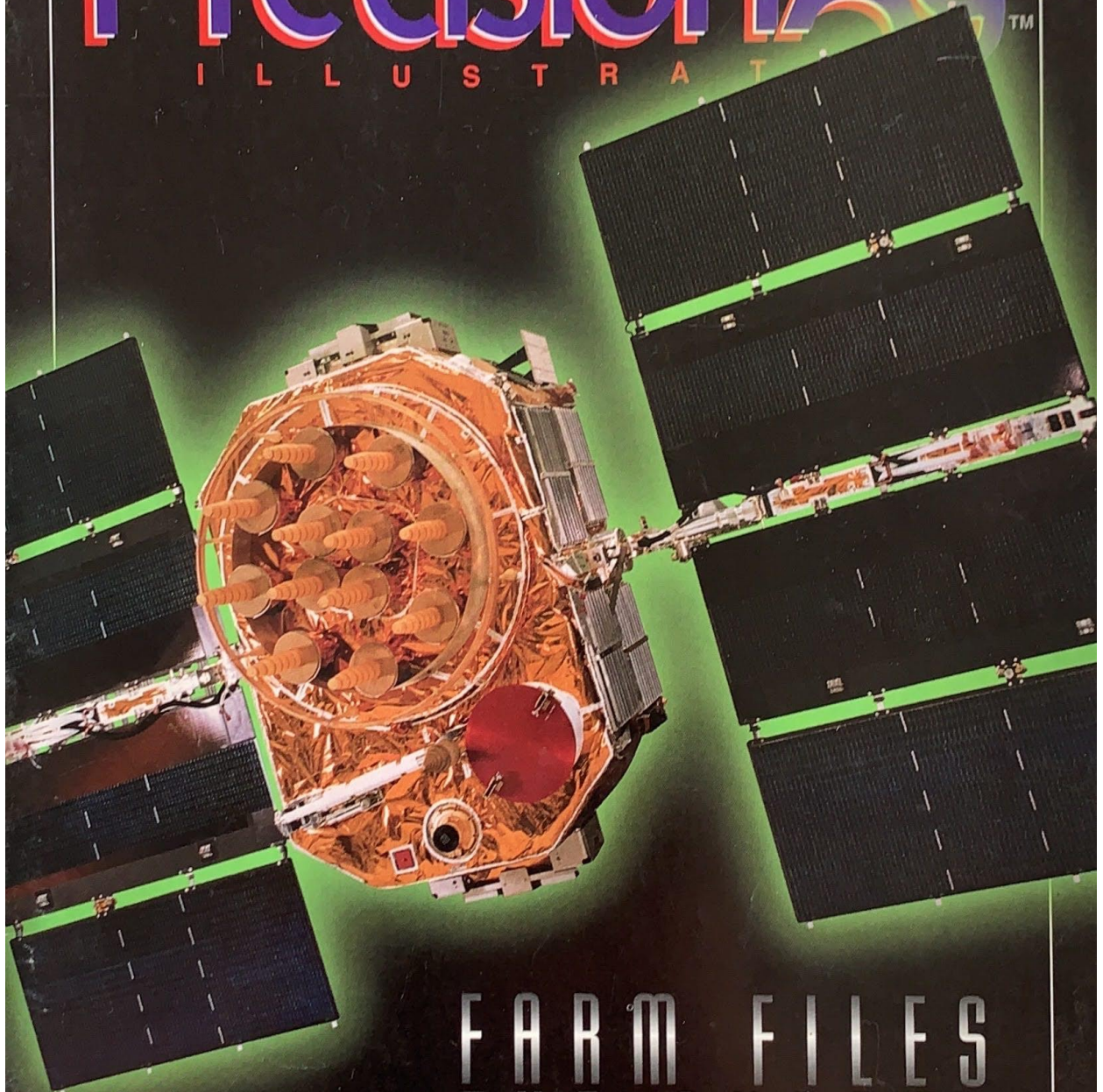


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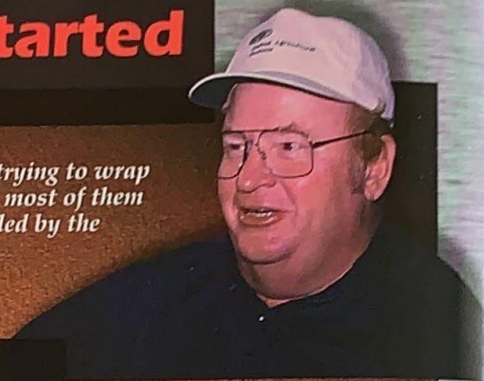


FARM FILES  
THE QUEST

# Doug Harford Gets Started

by K. Elliott Nowels

*"I'm not sure you want to get me started. Farmers are trying to wrap their arms around this thing called change, and I think most of them are really having trouble with it because they are repelled by the whole idea that they have to cope with it."*



**Q:** Let's first talk about precision farming per se — the concept of managing more closely with the help of computers, sensors and GPS. Is it working for you?

**A:** What's the goal? Every farmer has a goal of efficiency, if that's the goal, precision farming helps you to that goal. So the answer is yes. My farm and that of my neighbors may be very similar in terms of output. But the similarity may end there. The true output on my farm depends more on the soil and the weather than my farming practice.

**Q:** What's your suggestion for the first steps in getting started with precision farming?

**A:** Start with a vision for your operation. Not just tomorrow but 10 years from now. Create a vision and your decision will be obvious. How can you run out and make purchases without having this. You know, it's like listening to a motivational speaker. He will say, "set your goals and plan your action toward them, and you can be successful." But that assumes that you can really identify and understand what an appropriate goal is today.

**Q:** There are several different ways to approach precision adoption. Get with a dealer. Get with a consultant or integrator. Do it yourself. How would you classify yourself?

**A:** I started with a consultant. Farmers are never originators. We're just a conduit. As a consultant, Ron Olsen is the first one that challenged me to get over the hump here.

**Q:** But now you do it yourself?

**A:** Well, he helped me see a vision of efficiency that caused me to seek out the equipment. So, first, get a vision, and if you have trouble getting a vision, find a person who can help you get a vision. If the consultant you find can't help you determine a vision or doesn't want to start there, find another one.

**Q:** You conduct your operation on your own, but I know you cooperate with different companies and organizations — DuPont and others.

**A:** Yes. But it's something I'm beginning to have some doubts about.



**Q: Doubts about...**

**A:** The whole pet farmer system. Companies want to cooperate with us, but many don't want to hear the real answers to the questions they are asking. What they really want you to do is validate their technology or service. And many times they will seek out the people to help them do that. As a result, we are still stuck in transactional information, or only getting our information — our vision of our future — from the people who are selling us things.

**Q: What holds some farmers back?**

**A:** Everybody wants to perceive themselves as pioneers, but they don't really understand what that means. To be a pioneer you have to think a lot. You have to have a vision. And you have to be willing to risk. Farmers spend a lot of time avoiding risk. I get a lot of guys who come up to me at conferences and have a tale of woe about buying some new piece of equipment and having it not work out as they expected. After they go through all the terrible stuff and get to the end, I ask them: Well, what did you expect? I mean, you are buying brand-new technology, and you're putting it to use in your operation in a brand-new way to obtain results that you've never really thought about much. Gee, what did you expect?

**Q: What kind of a person can make precision agriculture work?**

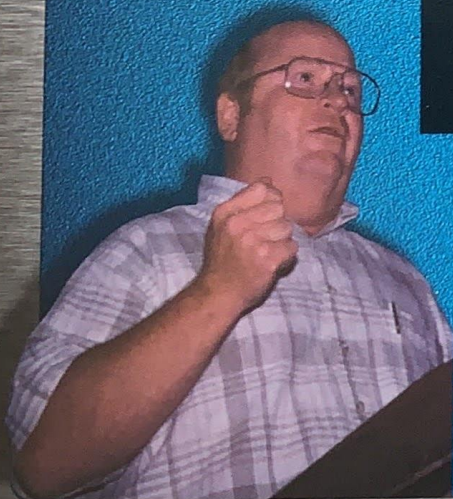
**A:** A person narrowly focused on efficiency of the production that believes the gains in efficiency will outweigh the investment in the technology.

**Q: That suggests that their vision is rather narrow.**

**A:** Well, your question suggests that precision adoption is a stand-alone facet of crop production, and it's not. You have to consider it against your overall vision for your farming operation.

**Q: Okay. Another dumb question. But one that farmers seem to obsess on. Has your adoption of precision farming made you any money?**

**A:** There's no direct dollar payback to precision. There's only opportunity. It has...given me a strange personal satisfaction. That's the satisfaction of learning more about the things I can control, and it's a relief to let the rest of it go. It's not a tool that tells you how to farm. But it's a powerful tool in helping you figure out how to do it. Farming though, is still an art.



**Q:** Some have a dim view of what we might term "post-modern" agriculture. Farmers as only puppets. Independence on the wane, etc. Is this scary or just business. Or both?

**A:** I think to respond to your question would be telling farmers their vision of the future. But the future will be what it will be. It's not mine. It's not yours. It's the future. Build relationships with people whose vision of the future you might value. This presents a wonderful opportunity for farmers to work together to create a collective vision. It's interesting to me that anytime we put on a conference in agriculture, people say they want to listen to other farmers. But in their own operations, then they go to a consultant to collect the hard data for their decision-making.

**Q:** So, they place emphasis on hearing other farmers and then devalue some parts of their own experience?

**A:** It's that most farmers are spending too much time on the science of farming. The value doesn't come out of the science per se. The value comes out of how we put that science to use in the art of farming.

**Q:** How do those of us with a passion for progress in agriculture take it to the next step?

**A:** I think we need to do it in groups of people that can appreciate the change of vision occurring in agriculture. We need group therapy (laughter).

