

WITH INTERNATIONAL REACH



--Iowa State University Research Park

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ent is the epitome of the long-standing, Iowa-based company.

Founded as a small, family-owned livestock feed operation in Indianola more

than nine decades ago, it has grown to become one of the largest feed producers in the world. From feed and related products for commercial livestock and domesticated animals—including fish, birds, and rodents—to feeds specifically for show animals, commodities, and products for human consumption, the Kent brand is international.

That international footprint, however, remains rooted in the United States and, more specifically, in Iowa. With plants in 10 states, Kent Feeds is headquartered in the southeastern Iowa town of Muscatine. From Muscatine, the company manages all of its corporate functions, sales, and research and development.

In recent months, Kent has extended its reach in Iowa, establishing a satellite office in the Iowa State University Research Park in Ames. Headed up by Jeff Underwood, the office serves a strategic purpose.

“We are all about innovation,” Underwood says. “We are looking for science-based solutions that will help us to better serve our customers. We want to work with world-class research universities and Iowa State fits that bill. It was an easy decision to establish a physical presence here.”

Proximity to Talent

From the office in the Research Park, Underwood coordinates a growing intern program focused on those with expertise in information technology, software engineering, nutrition, and research that aligns with Kent’s diverse product lines. But that’s not all.

“We are looking for students who are motivated and skilled in any and all disciplines,” Underwood says. “We are a very diverse organization. We offer everything from kitty litter to energy drinks. As such, we need interns and employees with a range of educational backgrounds.”

Like many large companies in recent years—among them Pella, Vermeer, and TMC Transportation—Kent saw expanding their strategic partnership with Iowa State as a win-win. Having an office space in Ames makes it easier for Kent to offer internships outside of the summer. And having Kent so close helps students get practical work experience at a company that has proven to be an international leader in its industry.

“Our primary reason for being here is access to the talent that Iowa State produces,” Underwood says. “It also offers an opportunity to keep an eye on the technology being developed here and to move to incorporate the technologies that will help us continue to innovate much quicker than we ever have. We see this office as one more way we are fostering growth organization wide.”

In the Center of it All

Choosing to set up shop in the Research Park also offered Kent the opportunity

to “network” with a number of other companies who have a presence in Ames. Underwood has long been involved with the Cultivation Corridor—an association of public and private partners working with Iowa colleges and universities to spur advancements and accelerate growth in the agbioscience, biorenewables, biotech and advanced manufacturing industries—and says it is valuable to Kent to be immersed in a culture of innovation.

“There are so many exciting startups and projects coming out of Central Iowa, and Ames, in particular,” Underwood says. “We wanted to be sure we had a front row seat to that innovation and that we were helping to drive it.”

There has also been a side benefit of having an office in close proximity to outreach offerings from some of those familiar, aforementioned Iowa companies.

“The environment for collaboration here is so rich,” Underwood says. “I can’t wait to see what the coming months and years bring.”

Underwood says that the leadership team of the Research Park went above and beyond to ensure Kent could find the right space to meet its corporate objectives with the satellite office.

“This was all brand new to us,” Underwood says, “we really don’t have anything like it anywhere else. We relied on the Research Park staff to help us through it. They were very responsive when we had questions and provided input that ensured we were ready to go as soon as we opened our doors. They made it easy for us to make this happen.”

