

Bringing it together



MAY 2006

Our Mission:

Agren, Inc. responds to agricultural and environmental challenges by providing comprehensive, integrated services to groups and individuals to positively impact our natural resources. The Agren team is dedicated to achieving client objectives through a commitment to quality and excellence.

Agren Services Now Available Through Federal General Services Administration

It's now easier than ever for government agencies to take advantage of the environmental consulting services provided by Agren. Agren has been awarded a Federal Supply Schedule contract through the General Services Administration (GSA). A GSA Federal Supply Schedule is a listing of contractors that have been awarded a contract that can be used by all federal agencies to purchase products or services.

Under the Federal Supply Schedule, GSA establishes long-term government-wide contracts with commercial firms, such as Agren, to provide access to millions of state-of-the-art, high-quality commercial supplies and services at volume discount pricing. These supplies and services can be ordered directly from GSA-approved contractors.

Agren's contract allows them to provide "Environmental Services" including environmental planning and documentation, environmental compliance, and waste management. Any government agency in need of these services may select Agren as their provider at rates established in Agren's GSA contract.

"GSA is a vehicle to help businesses work with the federal government," said Deana Hoeg, Agren's Business and Marketing Manager. "The government is the No. 1 buyer in the world. GSA was



created to make it easier for them to buy goods and services. It enables businesses to say 'this is my service and this is my price' without renegotiating each time a service is needed."

The advantages to using the GSA program schedule are many:

- Dramatic reduction in lead time to obtain services.
- No order limitations - you can place an order for any dollar amount.
- Government ordering offices have the opportunity to meet small business goals, while promoting compliance with various laws and regulations.
- Flexible purchasing options save you time and money.
- Task order based on Best Value in accordance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR).
- Competitive prices have been met.
- Prices have been determined to be fair and reasonable by GSA

Orders are placed directly with Agren in a "task order" fashion, and Agren provides services directly to the customer. Ordering through a GSA schedule greatly speeds the procurement process. A recent

study of the GSA schedules program found that it takes a federal agency an average of 15 days to procure services under a GSA schedule, compared to 268 days to procure services without a schedule. That's good news for agencies that want to do business with Agren.

"Now that we have been awarded a schedule, we are excited to let everyone know how much easier it is to do business with us," Hoeg said.

There are many benefits for U.S. government offices to procure goods and services from companies that have a GSA contract. Government ordering offices have no need to seek competition outside of GSA schedules, synopsise the requirement, and are not required to make a separate determination of fair and reasonable pricing. The ordering agency has already concluded that the order represents the best value and results in the lowest overall cost alternative to meet the government's needs.

Agencies have access to millions of commercial services and products that can be ordered directly from GSA Schedule contractors. They will be able to order the latest technology and quality services and/or products, conveniently and at most-favored prices.

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Agren Services Available Through Federal GSA (cont.)

It is because of these benefits that the more than 5,000 federal government buying agencies prefer to buy from companies that have GSA contracts.

To view a wealth of information on GSA Schedules and contracting with Agren, visit <http://www.GSA.gov> or contact Deana Hoeg at deana@agren-inc.com.

The website includes tutorials and comprehensive information.

Prescribed Fire Message Reaches Dozens of Participants at Series of Winter Meetings

Fire was the hot topic at a series of educational meetings held through the winter in the Loess Hills region of western Iowa. The meetings were part of an educational outreach project to increase the understanding and application of prescribed fire in the hills. The ultimate goal of the project is to restore native plant communities and revive economic opportunities associated with livestock grazing.

Nearly 190 Loess Hills landowners took part in eight educational programs presented at various locations along Iowa's western border from December through February. At the meetings, participants received detailed information on the benefits of prescribed fire, the services of the Loess Hills Burn Crew, and financial incentives to scheduling a prescribed fire.

"We want to help landowners to understand that the native prairie is worth keeping and protecting," said Bob Moritz, past chairman of the Loess Hills Alliance. The Alliance received funding for this project from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) REAP program, and the Alliance contracted with Agren to coordinate much of the work.

Several prescribed fire experts joined with Agren staff as presenters at the series of meetings. Matt Graeve, burn boss for the Loess Hills Mobile Prescribed Fire Crew based in Council Bluffs, talked about his crew at each session. The Burn Crew is available to help landowners plan and execute a controlled burn on their property. Graeve said he believes the series of meetings was effective as an educational tool.

"I think overall they were helpful in getting new people to the table," he said. "I've had a few landowners call and ask for follow-up."

Graeve and his crew already have 13 prescribed fires scheduled for this spring, but he said he intends to follow-up with interested landowners as time permits.

Also attending each session was Agren President Tom Buman. He said that although the company has worked with insurance issues and conducted feasibility studies related to prescribed fire in the past, this was their first educational project with fire.

"We wanted to increase the number of prescribed fires and



Matt Graeve, burn boss for the Loess Hills Mobile Prescribed Fire Crew, explains the benefits of prescribed fire to a group of landowners from the Percival area.

motivate people to use prescribed fire," Buman said.

All participants were surveyed at the conclusion of each session. Results show that 71 percent of those in attendance have land that would be eligible for a burn. Landowners' interest in conducting a burn and exploring financial assistance both went up following the meetings, according to the surveys.

In addition to the series of meetings, the prescribed fire project resulted in release of several press releases and radio interviews, as well as creation of promotional mailings and information packets. As the project winds down, Agren personnel are preparing their final report to REAP.

Buman said that the success of the prescribed fire educational project has prompted Agren to contemplate a follow-up project. One possibility is outreach to absentee landowners – those who own land in the Loess Hills but don't live there or manage the land directly.

"They're part of the ecosystem and they need to be informed," Buman said.

Ranchers Assist Agren to Make TGM Grazing Software More User Friendly

Thanks to the input of several ranchers from throughout the western and southern United States, great strides are being made toward making "The Grazing Manager" (TGM) software a valuable, user-friendly tool.

A little more than a year ago, Agren staff recognized a need to develop a tool to help rangeland producers make tough decisions about their herds during prolonged drought. After analyzing 17 different tools, Agren selected The Grazing Manager, which was originally designed at Texas

A&M University to help ranchers adjust their herd stocking rate more proactively. The goal of Agren's project is to take this proven tool and make it more user-friendly for ranchers who are struggling to manage under drought conditions.

Rob Ravenscroft, a retired Nebraska rancher now living at Lincoln, NE, was hired by Agren to work with TGM. He has met one-on-one with ranchers from Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico to help them master TGM and find the "bugs" that need

to be worked out. Comments and questions raised by the "test group" are then shared with a computer programmer to improve the software.

This group of ranchers represents several different grazing styles ranging from season-long to intensive. They include members of the Zuni Tribe in New Mexico and the Sioux and Assiniboine tribes on Montana's Fort Peck Reservation. The ranchers have different levels of computer

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TGM (cont.)

skills, but all share an interest in improving their herd management.

The first group orientation and TGM training session with Agren staff was held in May 2005 in Rapid City, SD. Ravenscroft later scheduled two or three on-site visits with each rancher, and met with them as a group again in February in Rapid City. By working one-on-one and as a group, Ravenscroft said the sessions "gave us all a greater understanding of TGM, how to use it and what to expect from it."

"We all learned about TGM together," Ravenscroft said. "Tracking livestock as 'herds' and quantifying range production in terms of energy for maintenance and gain are new concepts, but this approach is precisely why TGM is such an effective

management tool."

TGM concepts that ranchers have struggled with are "demand days," "herd setup", and "forage year and utilization," according to Ravenscroft. Some of the benefits of the software that ranchers appreciate are the annual records it provides and the potential for drought forecasting, he added.

"In the midst of ranch work demands, our cooperators made time to work with me to keep their TGM databases updated," Ravenscroft said. "They now have a base to plan this summer's forage production and livestock demand. They will be practicing their observation skills as they record growing conditions, forage utilization, and grazing schedules. They are looking forward to testing TGM's prediction and planning

functions, and they also are anticipating a 'bug-free' software!"

Ravenscroft said he greatly appreciates the time the ranchers and agency people have taken to make TGM a valuable management tool.

"Their patience with a beta software, and the frustrations that go with it, was amazing," he said. "They were all willing to learn the computer skills required in using a program that hadn't been optimized for ease of use. Future users will never know how much they are benefiting from our testers' frustrations!"

Agren and Ravenscroft will continue to work with ranchers through the '06 growing season. A final software product is anticipated to be released in March of 2007.

New Employees Add Dimension to Agren Staff

In the fall of 2005, Agren had an unprecedented eight grant applications approved by various agencies and organizations. These eight new contracts were in addition to several ongoing projects already underway. This added workload created a need to hire additional staff. Since November, three new employees have come on board.

Piper Potthoff, a native of Carroll, began at Agren the first part of November. Piper recently graduated from Loras College in Dubuque, IA, with degrees in Public Relations and Spanish. During her time at college, she acquired event planning skills and was also able to study abroad in Granada, Spain, for a semester.

At Agren, Piper works on a national Conservation Innovation Grant for a Center for Absentee Landowners. She is helping to design a website to target landowners who do not operate their land. This website is designed to educate absentee landowners about the conservation programs that are available to them. Other projects that Piper assists with include the animation project for Best Management Practices and prescribed fire education. Piper also acts as the cultural liaison for the office as they begin to work with new clients. The event-planning skills that she acquired at college have been put to use planning expert panel meetings.

Piper was raised on a grain and livestock farm just outside of Carroll and is glad to be back in the community. She recently bought her first house in Carroll and is working on making it home.

Two weeks after Piper's first day, Mary Bower started at Agren. Mary brings to the Agren team more than 25 years of experience in the newspaper field. After graduating from Wartburg College in Waverly with degrees in Mass Communication



Joining the Agren staff since last fall are, from left: Mary Bower, Piper Potthoff and Austin Sewell

(Journalism) and English, Mary took a job as reporter for the Carroll Daily Times Herald, specializing in education and agricultural issues. She later accepted positions with Central Iowa Publishing in Bayard, and as editor of The Glidden Graphic in the mid-1980s. She has also done extensive freelance writing for various ag-related publications in Iowa.

At Agren, Mary assists with Iowa Farm*A*Syst, an on-farm water quality education and risk-assessment program. She is currently coordinating an outreach program to rural Iowans on proper handling of solid wastes and hazardous materials, and

prepares scripts for computer-animated videos of soil and water conservation practices. Mary was raised on a grain and livestock farm in northern Iowa, and now lives with her husband, Mark, on their farm in Guthrie County near Coon Rapids. They have two children: Hannah, a sophomore at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, and Ross, a junior at Coon Rapids-Bayard High School.

The newest member of the Agren team is Austin Sewell, who came on board in late March. Austin is a rangeland professional with a Bachelor of Science degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management from Oklahoma State University (2005). He was raised on a cattle ranch near Fort Worth in north-central Texas. Austin brings to Agren expertise in grazing and rangeland ecology and management. He has previous fulltime experience on various cattle ranches.

Austin assists with grazing and rangeland related projects at Agren including the Loess Hills Grassbank project, and development and implementation of The Grazing Manager software. Austin and his wife, Valleri, have settled in Breda, IA.

Get to Know.....Deana Hoeg, Agren's Business & Marketing Manager



Deana Hoeg, Business & Marketing Manager

More than likely, the friendly voice that answers your call to Agren is that of Deana Hoeg, Business and Marketing Manager since January 2004. Deana's responsibilities are far-ranging and crucial to the smooth running of Agren's small staff.

Deana grew up in Sioux Falls, SD. Her first exposure to agriculture was as a Soil Conservation Aide in Worthington, MN, where she met her future husband, Mike Hoeg. Several years later, Deana and Mike moved back to his family farm in Lake View, IA. After moving to Iowa, Deana was

hired by Tom Buman, District Conservationist at the Carroll office of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). She also worked part-time at the NRCS office in Sac County. It was during her 10 years with NRCS that Deana said she developed a strong understanding of government policy.

After her husband's untimely death in a farm accident, Deana returned to college and earned her Bachelor's Degree from Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, IA, majoring in Business Management/Entrepreneurship. After graduation, in an interesting twist of fate, she was again hired by Tom Buman, who by then was running his new company, Agren, Inc., with his brother, Stan.

Deana's responsibilities at Agren consist of all aspects of financial management including payroll, billing, budgeting projections, state and federal reporting and auditing. She is also responsible for the marketing direction of the company, which includes researching government procurement opportunities and developing and implementing short and long-term marketing plans. Additional duties involve human resource issues, maintaining the employee benefits program and, finally, overseeing the daily operations at Agren.

"As a city girl, I never dreamed I'd be so deeply involved in agriculture as I am now," Deana said, "but now I have a greater understanding of agriculture and the environment, and have appreciation, admiration and respect for everything Tom and Stan have accomplished with their business."

Outside of Agren, Deana spends most of her time raising her two children, Audrey, 13, and Mitchell, 9, and supporting them in their activities – soccer, track, volleyball, baseball, softball and wrestling. She's also active in her church as director of Vacation Bible School and teaching Sunday School.

Deana describes herself as self-sufficient and independent, and is very grateful to her adopted community of Lake View. "It's a wonderful place to raise your family," she said. "This community has been so important to me, and I can't imagine living anywhere else. I am also very fortunate to have Mike's parents, Graham and Norma, close since they have been instrumental in helping with Audrey and Mitch. My world revolves around my friends and family."

