Have you heard the term blockchain yet? If you haven’t you will! I’ve been in a couple sessions on this during the winter. The questions for us are: what will it look like, how will we adapt, what is the cost and how soon will it be required by consumers. But it is coming! Following is an article we will reprint for you to familiarize yourself.

The Blockchain Bandwagon Is Ready... Are You?
Steve Cubbage

For those who thought blockchain technology was just another passing fad like mood rings, eight-track tapes and Rubik’s Cubes, think again. In early October of last year, blockchain technology took quite a big step toward becoming a permanent part of the day-to-day agricultural landscape. That’s because after 18 months of testing, IBM has green-lighted the commercial availability of its food safety blockchain-based platform dubbed IBM Food Trust, which is designed for global use by farms, distributors and retailers.

The system literally digitizes the tracking of food throughout the entire supply chain by tagging each actionable event to an auditable historical record. Using the platform greatly increases traceability and accountability and enables supply chain management to rapidly isolate specific batches and shipments when foodborne illness or contamination is detected.

To date, most of mainstream Midwestern agriculture has been able to largely ignore blockchain’s implications—especially at the grower and retail levels. It was looked on as more concept than reality and more hype than practicality. It was and continues to be a technology surrounded with more questions than answers. And with continued low commodity prices, an escalating trade war with China and rising interest rates, it is no wonder why blockchain hasn’t cracked the top 10 on most corn farmers’ to-do lists.

However, this announcement by IBM may be the tipping point that could very well change all that. Even if production agriculture hasn’t fully jumped on the blockchain bandwagon, some big names in the food chain have. The IBM Food Trust network represents the continuation of more than a year of pilot tests with major retailers and food suppliers including Golden State Foods, McCormick and Company, Nestle, Tyson Foods and Walmart. This group of companies formed a consortium in collaboration with IBM to use its food safety blockchain in order to protect consumers and enhance trust in the consumer food supply.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die from foodborne illnesses each year in the U.S. To make a dent in those numbers, IBM used its blockchain pilot companies to build a robust network of members along the entire supply chain.

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that would work in sync with each other to create end-to-end transparency. Bridget van Kralingen, a senior vice president within IBM Global Industries’ blockchain division, was recently quoted as saying, “The currency of trust today is transparency, and achieving it in the area of food safety happens when responsibility is shared."

**In order for growers and even production agriculture as a whole to achieve such transparency, it is going to have to go digital and go there fast.** One agriculture industry official heavily involved in bringing blockchain to market says that if you would look at a clay tablet from the ancient land of Mesopotamia 4,000 years ago, then you can compare it to current grain contracts in North America today. His point is that unfortunately grain marketing and even the recording of activities at the farm level are still much closer to the clay tablets of old than they are to the Amazons or eBay’s that are now the norm in consumer retail today.

The bottom line is that in order to avoid being the weak link in the food supply’s blockchain system, producers and their immediate suppliers must adopt a well-thought-out and complete digital strategy starting at the farm level.

There is a vision that with the increasing use of sensors and digitization of processes on farms and in the agriculture supply chain, connecting via blockchain will mean less paper, more accuracy and quicker turnaround and traceability from farm to fork. That’s the vision, but the details of that vision must be better communicated at the grower level. What does a blockchain-ready farm actually look like? What exactly needs to be digitized, and how does it actually get linked back to blockchain? Where does one even start in checking the boxes to make your farm a preferred blockchain supplier?

**Those are all relevant and urgent questions that need to be answered.** Unfortunately, many suppliers and players higher up in the food supply chain wrongfully assume that such digital infrastructure at the grower level is already in place and there is all of this data and a host of digital devices just waiting to be connected. Such assumptions and lack of education and dialogue back down to the grower level will continue to be a major Achilles’ heel in the implementation of blockchain in agriculture until people realize this is not the reality back at the farm. Growers, however, cannot continue to ignore the situation and plead ignorance when it comes to blockchain technology.

Why? Because as of October 2018, when it comes to blockchain, we’re no longer playing preseason games. The regular season for blockchain in agriculture has started, and IBM and its team of food heavyweights are marching down the field. That leads to questions for you. Are you still sitting on the sidelines, or are you ready to play?

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**Lumberyard**

We have seen lumber, plywood and OSB prices slowly come down from late summer, possibly due to the weather and interest rates. Because of this, the mills have decided to slow production keeping prices from lowering more. We will wait and see what happens.

New at the Lumberyard are Diablo saw blades, grinding wheels, sanding discs and other items. Stop by and add an assortment to your supplies, you will enjoy their high quality! If you are planning on doing any building or needing materials this year, please give us a call at 618.243.6137.

Dave Wilke
Lumberyard Manager
Dave Newcomb with the Illinois Fire Institute was one of our guest speakers at Top Ag’s 6th Annual Open House on February 7th. Dave’s message was something you’ve probably heard before. However, you can never be reminded too often about the importance of grain bin safety.

It only takes 5 seconds for you to become trapped in flowing grain. After 22 seconds, you will be completely covered. When someone is waist deep in grain, it takes 325 pounds of force to be able to extract that person from the grain. If you are completely engulfed, it will take 800 pounds to extract you from the grain. And if you are just two inches underneath the grain, it will take 1500 pounds to extract you!

Three factors that lead to grain entrapments include flowing grain, bridged grain and avalanched grain. You should NEVER enter a bin while it is unloading! The safest way to ensure the grain will not flow while you are in the bin is to lockout the auger. Lockout tagout is the easiest method used to prevent unexpected startup of machinery. You simply place a lock on the piece of equipment to prevent anyone from being able to turn it back on and a tag to notify others you are in the bin. It is important to know that these locks should have only ONE key as this keeps others from unlocking the lock and turning on the equipment. Always keep this key on you when you are implementing lockout tagout. Lockout tagout kits are inexpensive and can be purchased off Amazon. I encourage all of you to utilize these kits in order to keep yourselves safe.

Out of condition grain is the leading cause of entrapment. Bridged grain will form a hard crust with a void below that crust. When you get into the bin to inspect, that crust will quickly collapse and you will become covered. Avalanchased entrapment occurs when there is grain on the side of the bin and when you try to knock down the grain, it avalanches on top of you and entraps you. Increases to grain entrapments follow years where grain quality is hard to maintain in the bin. Make sure you manage and monitor your stored grain for quality to prevent out of condition grain entrapments from occurring! You should never enter a grain bin alone! Someone should always know when you are in a bin and should have communication with you during the entire bin entry.

I hope all farmers have a safe and successful year. I am happy to be a resource to all of our customers. If you have any questions in regards to safety on your farm, please don’t hesitate to reach out.

Top Ag will be hosting Seed Corn Pick-up Days at the Trenton Seed Warehouse starting Thursday, March 21st at 8:00am and ending Saturday, March 23rd at 1:00pm. Doughnuts and coffee will be available throughout the day. Lunch will be provided from 11:00am to 1:00pm. Those who pick up their seed corn before or during the Pick-up Days will be entered into a drawing at the end of the week. The winners will be notified and a list will be posted at each location the following Monday.

Soybean supply and germination will be an issue for certain varieties this year due to the wet conditions this fall. It is highly recommended to add a seed treatment to low germination seed to boost emergence and vigor. Asgrow 46X6, Asgrow 36X6, Asgrow 44X6 and Croplan 4117s will be especially tight this year. Please contact your local Top Ag agronomist as soon as possible to ensure you can get the best soybean varieties for your farm.

Don’t forget that Top Ag can supply you with all of your small seed needs such as alfalfa, grasses, clovers, cereals, cover crops, and forage mixes. Also be sure to check out our new assortment of garden seed, available only in Okawville, Pierron and Trenton! Call Jake (618) 979-7211 for availability and pricing.
The corn market for the past 60 days has been extremely quiet. Since the first of the year, we have seen March corn futures trade a high of $3.84 to a low of $3.68. However, if you take out a day or two of high and low days in the corn market, we have traded corn between $3.75 and $3.81. The long awaited crop report for January, which actually didn’t come out until Feb 8 due to the government shutdown, did little to the market. We did see a reduction in yield of 2.5 bushel per acre, but the loss of production was offset by a reduction in overall usage. The market was looking for lower ending corn stocks, but was disappointed with the report. The stock to use ratio on corn is the tightest it’s been since the 2013 crop, which could lead to an interesting market if we get into planting delays this spring.

The soybean market, on the other hand, does not have much to get excited about. The ending stocks were lowered but still remain the highest ever. The stock to use ratio on soybeans are more than doubled from a year ago. To put things in perspective on the soybean carry out, we have more soybeans in ending stocks this year than 2011 thru 2015 combined. If, and hopefully when, the trade deal with China is finalized, the market should get some sort of boost. This deal, however, will not correct the current over supply of soybeans.

The wheat market had a tough couple of days recently as we lost 30¢. The market saw some liquidation of positions and export business lost to other countries. The western wheat market has ample moisture going into the growing season this year, which could limit any weather related rallies.

Overall, look to make sales on corn and soybeans as we approach recent highs in the market. The ending stock situation in soybeans could lead to some uncomfortable prices this summer if we have favorable weather.

We currently have one program to offer on old crop Non-GMO corn. We have a 15¢ per bushel premium for May/June/July 2019 Buyers Call delivery. This program has limited space, so you may want to lock your bushels in sooner rather than later. At this time we do not have a program to offer on old crop Non-GMO soybeans. If you have some old crop Non-GMO beans on hand, I can put you on my call list in case a program becomes available.

On the new crop side we have limited space available on Non-GMO corn with a 20¢ per bushel premium. It has Buyers Call delivery periods of Dec 2019/Jan 2020, Feb/Mar 2020, and April/May 2020 available. New crop Non-GMO beans have a premium of $1.65 per bushel at this time. There are two delivery periods to choose from, either Nov/Dec 2019 or Feb/Mar 2020.

Give me a call if you have interest in any of these programs, I can be reached at the Trenton location; 618.224.7332 or toll free 1.888.508.3477

Top Ag would like to congratulate two of our customers that were recognized at the annual Dekalb/Asgrow Yield Chaser contest dinner, pictured to the right.

Roger Potthast, of Pierron, won the contest with Asgrow 42X6 soybean yielding 113.1 bushels per acre. Roger achieved these yields by placing the right variety seed on the right acres, and maximum foliar applications.

Receiving the 3rd place award for the Southern Region was R & D Dairy (Duane and David Thole) of Breese. R & D Dairy was honored for their 81 bushel per acre Asgrow 39X7 beans. This yield was based on an 80 acre field average.
We're On The Web!

Like Us On Facebook!

Top Ag Events

- CLOSED in Observance of Good Friday
  - Friday, April 19th
- EASTER
  - Sunday, April 21st
- CLOSED in Observance of Memorial Day
  - Monday, May 27th

Upcoming Events

- Fish Fry—Addieville
  - Addieville Community Club
  - Every Friday in February & March; 5:00p-8:00p

- Fundraiser Banquet—Greenville
  - Saturday, March 16; 5:00p
  - American Farm Heritage Museum
  - $30 per person; Purchase at Bradford National Bank or from a Museum Member

- MERBA Rabbit Show—Highland
  - Saturday, March 16; Madison County Fairgrounds
  - All Rabbit Breeds Accepted; Specialty Classes
  - $4 one show; $7 both shows; $3 Specialty Class
  - Sponsored By: Metro East Rabbit Breeder Association

- Purple & Gold Family Fun Run
  - Gretchen Wilson Park; Pocahontas
  - Saturday, April 13; Registration 7:30a
  - NO Dogs allowed
  - Sponsored by Pocahontas PTO

- Shriner Shuffle 5K/2K
  - Kingsbury Public Pool; Greenville
  - Saturday, April 27; 9:00a
  - Sponsored by Bond County Shrine Club

For Events & Information, Go To:
www.illinoisoft.org/events/
or
www.americanfarmheritagemuseum.com

Daylight Saving Time
Sunday, March 10th
Be sure to turn your clocks forward one hour. Use the time change as a reminder to change the batteries in your smoke alarm(s) as well as to make sure your emergency supply kit is fully stocked and replenished.

Skillet BBQ Porkchops

Makes: 4-6 Servings

Ingredients:
- 4 –6 Pork Chops
- 1/4 C BBQ Sauce
- 1/4 C Italian Dressing
- Salt/Pepper
- 2 T Vegetable Oil

Preparation:
1. In a large skillet, heat Vegetable Oil and add Pork Chops.
2. Season one side of Pork Chops to your liking and brown, repeat with the other side.
3. Once both sides of chops are browned add in BBQ Sauce (I use Sweet Baby Rays) and Italian Dressing.
4. Simmer for 5-7 minutes. Serve hot.

**Note: You may want to use more Sauce & Dressing than noted for even more flavor!**
Our Pierron location now has its own Grain Merchandiser! Brett Gilomen is from Highland where he was born and raised. After completing Highland High School he went to Illinois State College in Normal, IL and majored in Ag Business where he received his Bachelors Degree. He is a big sports fan and enjoys hunting and fishing in his free time.

He will be responsible for handling the grain merchandising and outside grain operations. Please come give Brett a warm welcome when you visit our Pierron Location.

Top Ag is currently offering Full-Time, Part-Time and Seasonal Help!

**Okawville:** FT Agronomy Operations/Driver, PT CDL Drivers, Seasonal Help  
**Trenton:** FT Grain Operations, FT Truck Driver, PT CDL Drivers, Seasonal Help  
**Pierron:** FT Applicator, PT CDL Drivers, Seasonal Help

Visit [http://www.topag.net/About/Careers](http://www.topag.net/About/Careers) today for an application, or visit any of our locations!