



Sinclair Elevator:

Growing in Tandem with Iowa Select Farms for more than Three Decades

When Roger Baker purchased a tiny, local grain elevator in Butler County in 1979, he never imagined the business would one day be one of the region's largest employers.

But in the past 4 decades, Sinclair Elevator LLC has grown from just 5 original employees to 48 today. At the same time, the elevator's original storage volume of 431,000 bushels has increased five-fold, to a current capacity of 2.1 million bushels of upright storage, plus another 1.3 million bushels of temporary storage. In recent years, Baker has turned the day-to-day management reins over to three lieutenants. Brent Kannegieter purchases commodities and manages fertilizer and crop-protection enterprises, Buddy Vanderholt oversees sales and distribution of seed and crop-protection inputs and Jim Luebbers manages Sinclair Elevator's now-extensive milling operations.

Luebbers, who has worked for the elevator for more than 25 years, says the story of Sinclair Elevator and its growth is synergistic with the evolution of Iowa Select Farms. "In the mid-90s, we learned about Iowa Select Farms' plan to build farms in our area," Luebbers shares. "We helped locate 8 farms that first year, and have expanding together ever since."

That exponential growth has profoundly changed the very nature of Sinclair Elevator's business model. In its origins, it was a standard, pass-through elevator. Today, Luebbers says all of their grain procurement is turned directly into swine feed and delivered to finisher farms locally. The demand is so great that Sinclair Elevator purchases corn and soybeans from other regional elevators beyond the inventory local farmers can supply.

Resurrection from the Ashes

Unfortunately, the path of progress for Sinclair Elevator has not always been a smooth one. The deadly EF-5 tornado that decimated Parkersburg in 2008 also made a direct hit on the elevator. Luebbers recalls Baker's words as the two stood together on a nearby bridge, assessing the devastation. "He said, 'It took 30 years to build this up, and 30 seconds for it to all blow away.'"

"OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH IOWA SELECT FARMS HAS BEEN A HUGE PART OF OUR GROWTH AND SUCCESS."

-Jim Luebbers

Some wondered if Sinclair Elevator might simply close its now-mangled doors and cease operations. Not a chance, says Luebbers. "We had too many people depending on us—for jobs, for services, and for the fiber of the local economy," he notes. "As overwhelming as it was, throwing up our hands and quitting never was an option."

Ironically, the lone structure left standing was the original elevator. Virtually everything else—grain bins, the feed mill, grain legs, augers, warehouses and office buildings—had to be cleared away and rebuilt.

"While we were busy recovering from the disaster, Iowa Select Farms was doing a lot of scrambling, too," he said. "It took us 4 months to get back into production, and we are extremely grateful for their loyalty."

More recently, Sinclair Elevator completed a new construction project in 2016—a massive, 170-foot-tall modern feed mill capable of producing customized, pelleted feed. With a production capacity of more than 750,000 tons of feed annually, it is one of the largest commercial feed mills in Iowa.

"We are proud to contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life in this region."



PROFILE

Sinclair Elevator LLC

PARKERSBURG, IOWA



Employees: 48

Iowa Select Farms purchases more than 4 million bushels of corn, 28 million pounds of soybean meal, and more than 200 million pounds of dried distillers grains from Sinclair Elevator annually.

Sinclair Elevator custom-blends and delivers pelleted and meal rations to Iowa Select Farms sites in a 20-mile radius around Parkersburg in northeast Iowa.

