

IFS delivering agronomy with ProCam UK



ProCam is a specialist agronomy and crop production company with operations in the UK and Poland. Thanks to founder Tony White's vision and investment from 3i, the ProCam business grew steadily from its formation in 1979, and by 2001 seven regional businesses had merged with ProCam to provide coverage throughout the UK.

In 2004 the Polish crop protection company Botus was purchased and ProCam Polska was formed. In 2008, 3i was bought out and ProCam Europe was formed as a parent company for both the UK and Polish businesses. Since then both ProCam Polska and ProCam UK have continued to expand with ProCam Europe establishing itself as Europe's largest privately owned agronomy group.

ProCam UK implemented IFS shortly after 3i was bought out. The implementation has driven undeniable efficiencies for its UK operations, and now the company looks ahead to a potential roll-out in Poland.

A meteorological balancing act

agronomy is defined as the science of soil management and crop production. ProCam provides farmers with scientific insights into what products they should use to drive up crop yields based on a wide number of variables. ProCam also provides farmers with the products that they need based on the consultative advice they receive.

The challenge in delivering such services and products stems from the fact that farming is highly seasonal and, in countries such as the UK, seasonal variations and boundaries are often blurred, sometimes on a daily basis. These meteorological challenges are complicated further by the fact that the products being delivered are often covered by strict regulations regarding use and storage. This makes the time from order to delivery a critical consideration.

About ProCam

ProCam's network of specialist regional businesses covers the whole of the UK and Poland and has over 30 years' experience in agronomy and crop production. Together with its teams of 'on-the-ground' professional agronomists, ProCam helps producers get the most from their arable enterprises. Over the last 16 years, ProCam customers have consistently achieved on average, 0.8t/ha more wheat than the Defra national average with the company's top 25 percent producing 2.2t/ha more.

www.procam.co.uk



On a peak day ProCam will face up to 3,000 order lines which will be processed within a two-hour window in the early hours of the morning. ProCam deals with about 150 manufacturers in the UK and nearly 10,000 different products including pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, molluscicides, rodenticides, and nutritional products for various stages of the crop lifecycle, plus some specialist seeds and fertilizers. These daily orders will reach one of 18 ProCam depots in the UK. The firm, which runs its own fleet of vans and lorries, will then deliver on the same day.

“People often won’t know what they want from us until they wake up in the morning and see what the weather is like,” says Nathan Sheppard, Group IT and Operations Director, ProCam. “Farmers don’t buy in advance because of storage and legislative reasons. They don’t want to store certain volumes of certain products because they are controlled chemicals. We face restrictions based on our licences, but the end users can only store a fraction of that. They buy some products in advance, but very little.”

In addition to the logistical challenges posed by delivering products at short order from a massive catalogue of potential orders to a highly dispersed clientele, ProCam must ensure that its depots remain efficiently stocked. “We run with relatively high volumes of paid for stock. We need to minimise that while maximising customer service. The more we can get access to what we’ve done and what we’re shipping out, the better the visibility we have and the quicker and better decisions we can make,” notes Sheppard.

Extensibility the key to success

having the ability to be able to get an entire view across the business and present that view quickly, accurately and in a meaningful way, to decision makers, would define the success of ProCam’s ERP implementation.

Prior to engaging with IFS, ProCam used an AS400 system to take care of orders, inventory, purchasing and finance. The system was basic, costly to run, inflexible and unable to provide the degree of visibility demanded by the business. Data analysis was incredibly laborious. Invariably this meant intelligent analysis often did not get done.

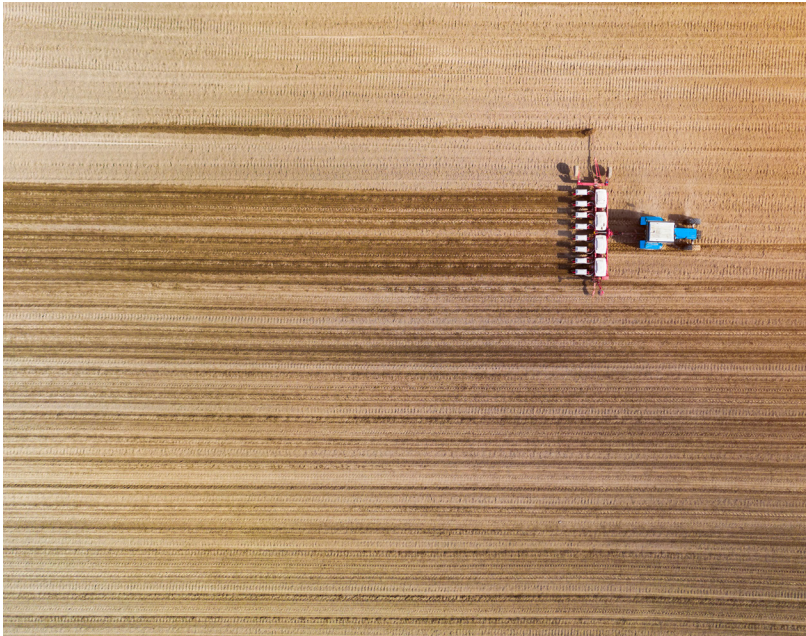
The decision to move over to a more sophisticated ERP system was more a case of when than if. In the end, though, it was triggered by the fact that ProCam bought out its investor 3i. The ability and promise of getting a flexible system up and running quickly was a key selection criteria for ProCam – and IFS delivered. From purchase to go-live took a 10-person team six months.

Today ProCam is running its finance, distribution (customer orders and inventory), HR, business analytics, CRM, and purchasing departments using IFS. “The big thing for us is that, out-of-the-box, the product is incredibly flexible,” says Sheppard. “It has allowed us to have multiple very efficient processes to do similar things. For example, seed needs to be handled in a different way to rodenticides (which come with legislative requirements), the demand profiles are completely different. Additionally, there are different expectations around delivery and lead time.”

Benefits seen using IFS

- Out-of-the-box flexibility
- Rapid implementation
- Unprecedented levels of visibility
- More efficient stock management





Extensibility is a key benefit that IFS has over its rivals, thinks Sheppard. “If we need to make alterations and tailor the product, we can do it ourselves. We rely on IFS for technical support – although very little support is needed. The quality of the product is high. So all we use IFS for is to fix any faults. In the last 12 months we’ve worked with them on an interface to a logistics system that we use and we needed some specific functionality, beyond that we’ve had a handful of times we’ve needed to go back to IFS to ask for technical help.”

IFS has delivered unprecedented levels of visibility across the business enabling ProCam to reduce its volume of paid for stock by 25 percent. “Because we’ve got that visibility across the group of exactly what we’re selling hour by hour, what we’ve got and where it is, we’re keeping more of the right stock and a lot less of the wrong stuff. With 10,000 products that is a multi-million pound saving,” notes Sheppard.

What next?

In many respects the ProCam UK operation has proven to be a successful testing ground for IFS. Broadly speaking British and Polish farms face the same challenges. However, while the UK arable farming industry is more technologically advanced, more intensive and generates greater yields than in Poland, Polish farmers are faced with the challenge of keeping up with demand thanks to explosive growth across Eastern Europe. Rolling out IFS to its Polish operations would seem the next logical step for ProCam.

In the UK ProCam plans to roll out IFS to any new acquisitions, and upgrade its systems next year. The company is automating more of its processes, linking its agronomic software directly into IFS so that when crop advisors make recommendations for what goes on a field it appears in IFS. “As a broad brush we’re putting IFS at the centre of all of our processes. Where we have things that sit outside IFS, we’re linking that in, meaning IFS is the hub of everything, all data can be seen in IFS and all processes will run through it,” says Sheppard.



There’s a level of openness you don’t get with other ERP vendors. We know that we can pick up the phone if we have a problem and they will understand the significance to our business. Even though we’re a relatively small customer for IFS, the support staff, the consultants, they all have enough awareness about what matters to us to deliver a tailored service.

Nathan Sheppard, Group IT and Operations Director, ProCam

Find out more

Further information, e-mail info@ifs.com, contact your local IFS office or visit our web site, ifs.com

