

Background info on GROWMARK

GROWMARK is a regional cooperative doing business across North America. We provide agronomy, energy, engineering and construction, and logistics products and services, as well as grain marketing and risk management services via business-to-business, business-to-consumer, and through affiliated member cooperatives that use the FS trademark.

Headquartered in Bloomington, Illinois, GROWMARK's FY2021 revenues totaled \$9.4 billion. We employ approximately 500 people in our home office, and more than 8,000 people throughout our entire system.

The GROWMARK System began in the late 1920s when Illinois Farm Bureau members formed local cooperatives to ensure an affordable, consistent supply of fuel to their farms. Agronomy and other farm-related products and services were added soon after. In the 1960s, similar cooperative networks in Iowa and Wisconsin joined Illinois, creating FS Services. In 1980, GROWMARK was formed with the merger of FS Services and Illinois Grain, becoming a one-stop shop for all a farmer's needs, from seed to fertilizer, propane to grain marketing, finance to fuel. In the 1990s, GROWMARK became an international cooperative with the addition of cooperatives in Ontario, Canada, and today we have continued to expand our sales territory and product offerings.

The GROWMARK System consistently ranks in the top ten of the NCB's Co-op 100 ranking of the top cooperatives in the United States. We also rank in the top five ag retailers according to CropLife and are one of the nation's largest propane retailers.

Our cooperative roots compel us to provide excellent service to our customers and world-class training to our employees. We are known throughout the Midwest as trusted advisors, bringing the right solutions to the farm gate. We promote sustainability through the 4R program (right rate, right source, right place, right time) and the use of environmentally responsible fuels and farming techniques.

SCENARIO:

You are an Energy Management Specialist for an FS member cooperative.

Wittenberg Farms is a large corn/soybean operation run by Roger Wittenberg and located near one of your better customers. The farmstead has several large machine sheds, a variety of machinery (both John Deere and Case IH), and least a couple semi-trucks and trailers visible on the property. While you know of Roger, you don't know much about him except that the crop specialist who calls on him for your company calls him an "odd duck." You also know that Roger is the co-owner of a commercial landscaping operation with his daughter, Michelle. Michelle's Exterior Maintenance contracts lawn care and snow removal services for many businesses in your area.

You have a meeting with Roger today. As you pull into his driveway, you get a closer look at his operation. He has tanks for diesel fuel, gasoline, and a tote of DEF (diesel exhaust fluid). The fuel tanks appear to be older, with some visible rust, and the diesel fuel nozzle is laying on the ground.

Your objective in this meeting is to assess Roger's annual fuel needs and create a plan to serve him appropriately. Ideally, he would commit at least half of his business to you following your proposal, with the door open to increase his orders in the future.

Character background for judges:

- Roger is 62 years old. He has a bachelor's degree in farm operations from a state university (can be the same as the student you are judging).
- Michelle is 33 years old. She has a bachelor's degree in agribusiness from the same university.
- Wittenberg Farms has 3000 acres of corn and soybeans, half of which they own and half of which they rent.
- Roger uses a new Case combine, and has two newer John Deere 4 wheel drive tractors, meaning they use DEF along with diesel fuel. He also owns a Case self-propelled sprayer that does not use DEF.
- He has one newer Peterbilt semi truck that uses DEF and one older Kenworth semi that does not.
- Roger is a price-driven customer and tends to purchase inputs from the cheapest supplier, not sticking with just one for more than a couple years if the price isn't the lowest.

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Character background for judges (continued):

- He also plants a variety of seed brands, to spread his risk out among several different companies' traits.
- Michelle has recently taken over the job of spraying for the farm.
- Michelle's Exterior Maintenance has three crews of three full-time employees. They handle lawnmowing and landscaping in the spring/summer, leaf removal in the fall, and snow removal in the winter.
- The business owns three pickup trucks with trailers, three commercial riding mowers, six push mowers, three gas powered walk behind snow blowers, and a variety of gas-powered hand tools needed for their work.
- Roger has been farming for 40 years. He took over the farm from his father. Michelle is his only child and she helps on the farm when not needed in her landscaping business.
- Remember Roger has been called an "odd duck." Have fun with that. 😊

Roger's reasons for meeting:

- Discuss the benefits and value of doing business with FS.
- Explore bulk purchasing of fuel and other energy products to see if it can benefit both the farm and Michelle's business.
- Historically, you have used price as your main driver of fuel purchases. You have not done business with just one company for years, whoever has the cheapest product is who you buy from.
- Since taking a more active role in the farm operation, Michelle is pushing you to consider building a long-term relationship with one or two trusted suppliers.
- You are concerned with recent world events, especially how fuel prices and availability are affected. A supplier who can reassure you and/or offer financing or storage solutions will go far in earning your business.

Salesperson's objective:

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Potential objections:

- Why should we use FS?
- You appear to be rather young. Why should I trust you with my farm information when I've been farming longer than you've been alive?
- You're not the cheapest supplier out there. Why should I spend more money to buy from you?
- What benefit is there to sticking with one supplier especially when you're not the cheapest?
- How can you help my business remain successful? What about Michelle's business?
- Fuel prices are unpredictable with current world events. How can I be sure I'll get what I need at prices that make sense for my bottom line?