

Dale and Elaine Hauptert are the namesakes behind the Hauptert Institute for Agricultural Studies at Huntington University. Dale passed away in 2016, but his legacy lives on through a new program that offers agribusiness and agricultural education degrees.



Jeff Mize needs talented workers. He's not alone as company leaders in various industries around the state are in desperate need of skilled employees.

As president and CEO of South Whitley-based Ag Plus, Mize employs 131 associates at the agricultural supply and marketing co-op. But 36 of them will be eligible to retire in the next three to five years. His workforce needs are time sensitive.

"I'm not the only one – everybody is faced with that same thing," Mize offers. "(Farming) has skipped a few generations; opportunities weren't there for youth coming out of college. They've gone to different areas or decided that the revenue stream was a little better (elsewhere)."

But demand has rebounded out of necessity: Nine billion people will need to be fed by 2050. And an Indiana Business Research Center report from several years ago notes that agriculture is a nearly \$38 billion industry in the state.

Opportunities are bountiful in the field (no pun intended).

A new degree program at Huntington University, a small, private Christian-based college, might hold some of the answers to the workforce dilemma Ag Plus (and others) are facing.

Named for Dale and Elaine Hauptert, longtime Huntington trustees and supporters, the Hauptert Institute for Agricultural Studies has a two-fold mission: training new employees through an agribusiness degree and preparing new teachers through an agricultural education degree.

"I think the opportunities are endless in agriculture," Mize explains. "It takes good, intelligent people to feed the world. There are a lot of opportunities for these kids in feeding the population and the growth we're going to have. It's a fulfilling industry."

### **Faith. Family. Farming.**

Students who are seeking a small, faith-based university to earn

their agricultural degree can now look to Huntington and the Hauptert Institute. The first classes were offered in the 2015-2016 school year.

Sherilyn Emberton, Ph.D., Huntington's president since 2013 and a native of Texas, recalls flying into the Fort Wayne airport and being amazed by the expansive farm surroundings.

"I realized the significant role (of farming) in the families and began to ask the questions. It's obvious that agriculture is a warm and fuzzy opportunity; they love that part of the legacy. But the reality is, it's a \$37 billion (plus) business and who is supplying the next generation of talent and workforce?" she asks.

"People would very kindly say, 'Purdue.' I'm not asking the question right. Purdue is one of the best in the world. Who are the other schools that offer agriculture or agribusiness? It was Purdue. So, we began to do our homework of what are the other faith-based institutions that offer agriculture and there are less than a handful in the United States."

Purdue, a national and global ag leader, has worked with Huntington on developing the Hauptert Institute.

"Simply, as we all know, every student doesn't elect to go to a large school," Emberton asserts. "If we can walk alongside (Purdue) with an alternative, intimate experience, I think they're more than willing (to assist). And these are all potential pools for them for graduate students."

The "Faith. Family. Farming." motto of the Hauptert Institute resonates with students and their families, Emberton asserts.

"You cannot separate faith and farming. It will be and has historically been the industry that depends on rain and weather conditions and the support of the community or a family," she notes. "Everywhere we talk about how faith, family and farming tie together, and people share their stories with us about how their family or their faith helped them thrive or survive in this industry."

Exploring the symbiotic nature of faith and farming is one of the critical pieces, says Raymond Porter, Ph.D., director of the Hauptert Institute. And it goes beyond farming in Indiana or the United States,



Students seeking an agriculture degree now have the option to attend a small, faith-based university. An agriculture education program was approved by the Indiana State Board of Education in 2016.

as missionary work and ministry are also highlighted.

“There are discussions going on right now about what does it mean to be a good steward. How do we take care of the resources, and what’s the basis for it in the Christian scriptures?” he says. “We make sure students understand this is connected with who we are as spiritual beings as well as human beings.”

### Business engagement

Rex Schrader II, president of Schrader Real Estate and Auction Co. in Columbia City, is involved with the Hauptert Institute Ag Advisory Board, as is Ag Plus’ Mize. Both companies also partner with the university to offer internships to agriculture students.

“We love being exposed to kids that could be potential employees down the road and feel an obligation, whether or not they come work for us, to expose kids to the ag industry and opportunities within the ag industry,” Schrader offers. “It’s tougher and tougher to find well-rounded students with education and a real willingness to work and continue to learn post-college.”

Porter says companies were eager to be involved.

“Day one, when I started, there were companies and area agribusinesses that said, ‘We want to help with a scholarship, provide a place for an internship.’ There has been some solicitation going out and talking to people, but it’s, ‘How can we be involved?’” he marvels.

“They are hungry for graduates who understand things from the same kind of perspective that they do. ... It resonates with what we’re doing and they’ve been very supportive.”

Emberton highlights the need for students who are comfortable in the classroom and in the fields.

“We ask, ‘What kind of worker do you need?’ (They say) ‘someone who is proficient in business skills, great communicators, and can put their boots on and walk into the field and talk to the farmer.’ They gave us some good guidance and we’ve tried to follow that, and we keep them at the table.”

The university has received a number of monetary donations as well toward the institute, including a \$250,000 gift in November.

Mize’s company also donated \$10,000 toward the institute in 2015 and plans to continue investing on an annual basis.

“The reason we want to support that ag program is that Huntington sits right in our territory. We feel we want to be a strong supporter of that university, and a strong supporter of youth in agriculture, and we will continue to do that,” he adds.

### Plowing ahead

Huntington’s agriculture education program was approved by the Indiana State Board of Education at the end of 2016. The goal is to stem the shortage of agriculture teachers here and nationwide.

“Many of these students who have good FFA teachers as role models, they look at that and think, ‘That’s what I want to do,’”

Porter contends. “They see coming here as an opportunity to follow in their footsteps and be part of that next line of ag teachers that can carry on that tradition. They see there is a need and a shortage.”

About 20 students are majoring in agribusiness in some form, Emberton points out. Others take agriculture courses, but might not choose it as their major. The first student graduates are likely next school year.

“They’ve been pioneers. They’re so cute,” Emberton quips in her Texas drawl. “We go and set up booths at the National FFA and at the farm show. I think they’ve taken great pride and great ownership, and they’ve also walked us through the bumps. We are indebted to their commitment to us, and they have helped us navigate this.”

In a “growing phase” currently, a new faculty member will be added and a second building is in development.

“We’re building our first additional ag facility. It will be a large crop science production facility. You and I would call it a greenhouse. There will be research stations in there and different staging in that, and it will be connected to our science building. We raised those funds this fall,” Emberton shares. “We hope to have shovels in the dirt no later than May or June.”

**RESOURCES:** Sherilyn Emberton and Raymond Porter, Huntington University, at [www.huntington.edu](http://www.huntington.edu) | Jeff Mize, Ag Plus, at [www.agplusinc.com](http://www.agplusinc.com) | Rex Schrader II, Schrader Real Estate and Auction Co., at [www.schraderauction.com](http://www.schraderauction.com)