

Allied Grain Systems: Growing Together

By Nicholas Paul Griffin

Recording an annual turnover of \$15m, New South Wales' Allied Grain Systems has grown from humble beginnings to become a market leader in the Australian grain storage and conveying industry. The company's philosophy is to build for its customers cost effective grain storage and handling systems to suit specific requirements, whilst taking into consideration the future needs of the customer to remain cost effective. Company founder and Managing Director John White explains how Allied Grain Systems began and where it is heading.

John White

Mr White grew up near Bogan Gate, New South Wales, on a family sheep and wheat property, where he started to develop his practical experience as well as personal values, before moving to Sydney to start work in the mechanical field and study engineering.

"Over a number of years I completed the engineering qualifications with the Institute of Technology," he explains, "and then in about 1989 I moved back to Young in NSW and continuing studying externally."

Mr White began working in an open-cut mine in Young, doing mechanical and production work. After that he worked for a major construction company, National Engineering, as a mechanical engineer, handling projects such as moving tier seating at Docklands Stadium.

"We used to do lots of conveyer systems for the Ricegrowers and GrainCorp and those type of customers. We used to design and build a lot of conveyers and grain storage systems, therefore I got involved in a lot of the design work and a lot of project management as well."

After that, Mr White was asked to become a partner in a grain storage company, which he accepted, filling the role for a short period of time before moving on to set up Allied Grain Systems in 2004.

"We started with minimal capital, but a really good wealth of industry knowledge and good client contacts from the previous fifteen-odd years. I knew a lot of the engineering staff at GrainCorp and Ricegrowers, SACBH and CBH at the time, so I did have good contacts there."

Mr White's connections helped to add the extra support needed in starting up the company, providing an excellent platform to move forward commercially. The company also benefitted from some significant international support.

"When I started Allied Grain Systems, Global Industries in America backed me as well, so they understood what I wanted to achieve and where I wanted to go. I had numerous conversations with the CEO, Doug Fargo, at the time, and we had a vision."

Global Industries likewise had a vision for how it wanted to proceed in Australia, and this resulted in Allied Grain Systems becoming the sole supplier of Global Industries' silos and conveying equipment in Australia.

"We've sort of grown together," Mr White says, "and it's been a real partnership. That's evolved and the partnership has got stronger and our turnover with Global Industries has increased over the last twelve years."



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John White (left) of Allied Grain Systems is consistently recognised as a Regional Company achieving success across Australia

Best in the Business

One of the most important parts of the business is ensuring client satisfaction, something the company achieves by adding value for clients across the eastern seaboard, working direct with customers and retaining a significant percentage for repeat business.

“With value adding, being a project engineer, a mechanical engineer, we identified that we wanted to have the best product available in Australia to present to our clients. We didn’t want to have the second best or third best, we wanted to have the best product.”

The company has worked extremely hard to achieve this goal, and Mr White believes that Allied Grain Systems has succeeded in its task to offer the best grain storage equipment in Australia for purchase.

“We work really hard to understand what our clients’ needs and wants are,” Mr White explains, “and we understand that it is our duty of care to provide our clients with a cost effective solution and a well-engineered solution to give them what they want.”

The company has invested a lot of money into research and development over the years, taking advantage of a big push for sealed silos in Australia. Allied Grain Systems is currently one of only two companies that can provide flat-bottom sealed silos for fumigation purposes.

“What’s happened in Australia is, there’s a lot of resistance from insects in the storage of grain around Australia, and the resistance is coming from a lot of sealed storages where they fumigate but the concentration levels of the gas dissipates.”

This means there is not the correct concentration of gas in these storage vessels, which allows some stronger insects to become resistant and breed, making the fumigant products ultimately redundant.

“We’re sort of running out of fumigant products to gas these insects to kill them. The remaining products they want to try and keep, and to keep the remaining products you have to have storage vessels that are gas tight, and there’s only two of us in Australia who can do that at the moment.”

A large amount of the company’s efforts and resources have gone into making this possible, and Mr White admits that the company now provides every one of its customers with gas-tight silos.

"We really try and listen to what our customer's needs are," Mr White explains, "and we spend a lot of time doing preliminary front-end engineering for them with designs and process flow and that type of thing, so we just try and get the design right at the start."

By doing this early design work, the company eliminates many of the major problems that can arise later in a project. Allied Grain Systems also prides itself on looking for future stages of the project, leaving additional room for project expansions should they be required.

"Most of the clients that we work for, a lot of these people double what they think they're going to need as far as storage and conveyer systems go. Within five to seven years the industry's just been moving forward."

This future planning also helps the company retain nearly 100% of its business, of which 60% currently represents repeat business, proving that it continues to give excellent service to its customers, as well as offering further growth within its projects.

"We as a company just understand that our customers are our lifeblood, and we have some pretty strong mottos about what is a customer. Our company culture is towards customers; we say 'what is a customer?' and we've got seven points."

The company lives by several mottos, such as 'the customer is the most important person to enter the office, whether by person, email or by phone', and 'a customer is not dependent upon us, we are dependent on the customer'.

"We find that the customers really appreciate what we do and how we go about it, and so if they go and do something in the future we form that relationship, so when our customers grow, we as a company grow with them, and it's like an evolving relationship."

Mr White explains how some of his customers have been in business with the company for over twenty years, a fact that suits the company very well in terms of keeping strong and healthy relationships, which are the backbone of the business.

Success Stories

The company has worked with many big firms over the years, such as GrainCorp, Cargill, Barret Burston Maltings and Joe White Maltings, delivering exciting and innovative projects that have helped drive Allied Grain Systems' growth and profile.



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One of the company's most significant projects involved working with Australia's largest piggeries, which developed out of a relationship formed with Cameron Pastoral Company, one of the country's largest pork producers, based near Goondiwindi.

"We initially installed storage for these customers in 2009, and then last year they built a whole new mill and we designed their new additional storage and grain-handling system, which is four 4,000 tonne bins with fully automated conveying system, so it gives them more capacity of 16,000 tonnes to help them feed that new mill."

Cameron Pastoral Company has been in the business a long time, seeing significant expansion over the last ten years, meaning Allied Grain Systems has been able to grow alongside it during that period.

"That job is reasonably remote, so things aren't always that easy, but we actually really like working on those job sites. We just deal direct with the customer, there's no third party project management team involved."

This means the process to get approvals and other important procedures through is cleaner and clearer, with the customer putting trust in the company to get all the details correct, giving the team more freedom to provide the best possible outcome.

"So it's up to us to provide them with [the best job] without taking any short cuts, so at the end of the job we walk away and they're happy," Mr White explains, "and next time they expand, we get the phone call."

In 2013, the company began working on a project with GrainCorp in Geelong, working to rectify insect issues in the major export terminal at the Port of Geelong, as well as helping to increase container capacities.

"What we designed for GrainCorp was a new facility that has total automation for the fumigation so they can feed into the silo system from their existing storages there in Geelong and it'll go into three big 18,000 tonne fumigation and storage silos."

This new system allows GrainCorp to fumigate the silos over a 24-hour period, injecting the gas, which is automatically monitored and topped up when necessary, meaning at the end of the process all the fumigants are stripped, leaving the insect-free grain ready for export.

"We incorporated into that project container-loading facilities where they are able to load B-Double trucks with multiple containers on them without the truck driver having to get out of his cab. I think it's probably the quickest container loading facility in the country."

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The truck is then weighed on a special bulk weighing system that complies with Australian Weights and Measures in order to certify the amount being carried, before the containers are filled in about five minutes through computerised measurements.

The last step sees the truck move forward to a final drawbridge where an operator steps out and closes the container door and installs the shipping bolts to keep it locked and ready for overseas transport.

"It saves a lot of manpower to fill the containers from what GrainCorp were traditionally doing on that site, and it's a lot safer, it's got a lot more occupational health and safety advantages compared to how it was traditionally done before."

The company has also been working for quite a few years with CBH at its Metro Grain Centre site in Forestfield, providing the company over the years with upgrades, additional silos and storage.

Allied Grain Systems also works very closely with Cargill Malt, recently completing a new upgrade to its Adelaide plant, involving storage silos as well as the design of all the structures, walkways and conveyer systems.


"Cargill really like us, because we pay a lot of attention to the engineering detail and we also have very good occupational health and safety standards. They appreciate that we take our safety very seriously on site and we record everything. Our policies and procedures are very strict, and we run the site productively, in a very safe manner."

Over the years the company has developed a design philosophy that suits the way Cargill wants its equipment supplied, which has helped to create an exceptional professional understanding that has led to an excellent, longstanding relationship.

"Back in 2014, we completed a major upgrade at Cargill's Minto plant in Sydney as well. We installed ten new storage vessels, and associated structural and conveyer systems. It was a very tight site, we had to fit all storage in confined spaces to give them what they needed."

On top of these significant relationships grown by the business, Allied Grain Systems has been recognised a number of times within the industry for its exceptional work, receiving several awards.

"We won the 2007 Australian Bulk Handling Magazine major award for project and infrastructure," Mr White says, "and that was for a project that we completed for Riverland Oilseeds in Numurkah."

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Allied Grain Systems

In addition, the company has won the Business of the Year award at the Business Chamber of Commerce in 2014, as well as receiving several other instances of recognition for its work over the years.

According to Mr White, Allied Grain Systems' biggest asset is its excellent team of dedicated staff, each and every one of them willing to step up and take responsibility for their part in the running of the business.

"Without our dedicated and loyal workforce," Mr White concludes, stressing the importance of the team, "we would not have been able to achieve what we have, and what we are going to do in the future." ●

