

## AT A GLANCE

### ESAPCO

**FOUNDED:** 1979

**EMPLOYEES:** 390

**IMPACT:** More than \$36 million of new sales, retained sales, and avoided costs stemming from projects with CIRAS over the past three years.

**OVERVIEW:** The company aims to sell high-quality products with exceptional customer service to the agricultural, horticultural, building, and retail trade communities.



## ESAPCO—Planning for a More Productive Future

*It's been nearly 30 years since a Connecticut-based, farmer-focused catalog company took over an old chicken house in Hopkinton, Iowa, and lit the fuse on a commercial rocket.*

Today, the Engineering Services and Products Company (ESAPCO) boasts four brands, four divisions, 390 employees, and an industry-leading reputation for making greenhouses and tension fabric buildings. Now, as the company's rate of ascent levels off, ESAPCO's management is taking time to catch a collective breath and get their bearings.

"Because we grew so fast, we completely ran past the appropriate structure to be a manufacturing giant," said Dave Buchheit, Iowa-based vice president of operations for ESAPCO. "For example, we've never had a budget. We've never had a goal. It was always: 'Do more.' What that's left us with is probably an inefficient structure."

"We want to grow successfully, and we think we're at the point where we're changing tiers" in terms of the kind of company we are, Buchheit said. "We've been very successful where we're at. It just seems now like we're pulling a plow instead of running a race, and we want to make sure we're on the right path."

Early this year, ESAPCO and CIRAS launched a nationwide strategic planning process that, among other things, aims to make ESAPCO's Dyersville manufacturing plant more efficient. ESAPCO now makes more than 60 percent of what it sells—a significant change from the two-person, buy-it-and-sell-it operation that began in Connecticut in 1979.

Buchheit, then a poultry farmer, was an ESAPCO customer when he suggested in 1990 that the company set up shop in one of his unused buildings and create a Midwest distribution center. ESAPCO, which had already benefitted from a period of explosive growth in the U.S. pork industry, experienced another growth boost when the company began making and selling tension fabric buildings for farmers.

ESAPCO's production operation launched in 1997, when the company relocated to Dyersville. The firm now sells products through four different divisions (Farmtek, Growers Supply, Tek Supply, and Clear Span) and under four brand names (Grow Span, Clear Span, HydroCycle,

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and Fodder Pro). A call center and the corporate headquarters remain based in South Windsor, Connecticut.

“The hoop building side of it really exploded the company,” said CIRAS account manager Sean Galleger. “Then, customers wanted greenhouses to go with those buildings.”

Martina Bockenstedt, ESAPCO general manager, estimates that greenhouses now make up roughly 13 percent of the company’s revenue, and “probably a large part of that is cannabis.”

ESAPCO embraced the expanding popularity of medical marijuana by creating a full-service greenhouse enterprise. The company has its own greenhouse designers and engineers on staff, its own research and development team, and a dedicated demonstration area in Dyersville. Buchheit describes the support system as “basically our own cradle-to-grave approach to this thing” and a part of the company’s long-standing effort to provide its customers with top-quality service.

But the greenhouse business also faces reevaluation in light of America’s changing political environment.

Twenty-nine states have now passed laws legalizing marijuana for medical use. However, the drug remains illegal under federal law, and U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has asked Congress to revoke 2014 protections that were created to block federal interference with medical use.

ESAPCO officials, citing a geographically broad support base for medical cannabis, suspect the status quo is likely to endure. But if it doesn’t, Bockenstedt sees untapped portions of the greenhouse

**Top Left:** Truss segments are welded by a robotic welder to create a tension fabric building. **Middle:** An ESAPCO display area demonstrates potential uses for the buildings and serves as a test environment for the FodderPro feed system. **Bottom:** Another demonstration area shows how hydroponics equipment can be used inside a greenhouse.

**On the Cover:** Martina Bockenstedt, ESAPCO general manager, and Dave Buchheit, company vice president.

**CIRAS Mission:** Every day we will enhance the performance of industry through applied research, education, and technical assistance.

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market—such as aquaponics for vegetable production—that still could give ESAPCO plenty of room to grow.

“There are a lot of opportunities in other places that aren’t necessarily cannabis,” she said.

Galleger cites the issue as another example of how ESAPCO is a company at a crossroads.

“We’ve got a lot of initiatives that are getting started there,” Galleger said. “They’ve got to be poised to take on whatever’s coming their way. They just don’t know what’s coming their way.”

They do know, however, that they’d like to make more of what they sell. “I think, in general, the appetite to manufacture is what’s driving the strategic planning,” Buchheit said.

Galleger believes it’s ESAPCO’s breadth, as well as its customer service, that makes the company strong. “They give the customer what they want, and they can pretty much give it faster and cheaper than anybody else in the market,” he said. “Part of the strategic plan is understanding what differentiates them from their competition.”

Buchheit agrees.

“If the market changes, and there’s a need in the market, then we try to be as flexible as possible,” he said. “But we’re getting to a size right now where that’s starting to be a bit more cumbersome.”

CIRAS’ role will be to help company leaders make the best choices.

“We’ve used CIRAS frequently on projects and found their professionalism and their experience to be second to none,” Buchheit said. “It’s been a valuable relationship for us in the past, and we’re looking forward to continuing to work with them.”

➤ **For more information, contact Sean Galleger at [galleger@iastate.edu](mailto:galleger@iastate.edu) or 515-290-0181.**

## A NATIONAL NETWORK HELPING MANUFACTURERS THRIVE



**NATIONAL NETWORK**  
One Center in every state and Puerto Rico

Nearly **1,300**  
Experts

Nearly **600**  
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More Than **2,500**  
Service Providers

Interacted with **25,445**  
Manufacturers

## CIRAS + MEP = The National Network for Manufacturers *by Mike O'Donnell*

*One of the promises CIRAS makes to our clients is that working with us brings you more than just our 500+ years of combined industry experience. Clients also get connected with CIRAS’ vast network of experts. Usually, this means one of our great partners or the service providers we work with in Iowa. But frequently, it means tapping into the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) National Network.*

The MEP National Network is a public-private partnership of different-shaped centers located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. These 1,300 experts have deep backgrounds rooted in serving manufacturers. None are afraid to roll up their sleeves. In 2016, we combined to help more than 25,000 manufacturers and create an economic impact of more than \$14 billion.

Many of you have already experienced the national network. If you’ve participated in CIRAS programs such as ExporTech, Technology Scouting, or Training Within Industry, you’ve benefited from programs developed across the network. CIRAS also regularly brings in MEP experts from other states to help in areas such as internet marketing, ISO, and food safety.

That’s only a portion of what’s coming.

Today is an unprecedented time in manufacturing. We’re experiencing a shortage of manufacturing talent as a new generation takes the reins. Major disruptive technologies are hitting the market, and global competition is fierce. CIRAS is doing everything possible to help, but we can’t do it alone.

While CIRAS is executing on technologies like digital manufacturing and metal additive, our trusted partners in places like Michigan and California are deploying new tools to implement cybersecurity. And right up the road in South Dakota, they’re testing new ways to integrate cobots in small manufacturing operations.

As change evolves, CIRAS will continue to bring you the best of what’s out there. The MEP National Network is just one way we’ll help you redefine what manufacturing means to the world.

➤ **For more information, contact Mike O'Donnell at [modonnll@iastate.edu](mailto:modonnll@iastate.edu) or 515-509-4379.**





A Clarion Packaging employee waits to collect drink carriers for packaging.

## CIRAS Helps Clarion Manufacturing with Search for Sturdier Future

*A major manufacturer of egg flats and fast-food drink carriers has turned to CIRAS for help with the next phase of improving its business.*

Clarion Packaging—a 100-employee plant in Clarion, Iowa, with a sister facility in Brook, Indiana—first approached CIRAS roughly two years ago for help achieving food safety certification. The company now is working with CIRAS to test its product quality and plan for the future.

Founded in 2006, Clarion makes egg flats—the open-faced cartons that producers use to transport eggs in bulk—by mixing water with recycled paper and pressing the resulting pulp into a mold. The company uses a similar process to produce 85 million four-cup drink carriers a year for a major chain of fast-food restaurants.

Last year, Clarion turned to CIRAS for help understanding its egg flats. CIRAS experts used x-rays and an electron microscope to examine samples from both Indiana and Iowa. Results showed stronger, more uniform fibers in the Iowa samples, which also held up better in specially arranged crush tests.

“They could perceive that there was a difference in quality, but they didn’t know why,” said CIRAS account manager Derek Thompson. “It turns out that Indiana is using more cardboard” mixed in with the recycled paper.

Clarion plant manager Damond Roberts credits the disparity to “contaminants” in the recycled newspaper

available in Indiana. The Indiana plant, which CIRAS helped connect with experts there via the MEP National Network (see story page 3), since has changed its production process. CIRAS experts now are reevaluating that change. Soon, they’ll start discussing the future of Clarion’s manufacturing process and whether the company should shift to new materials.

“The recycled paper’s not always going to be there,” Roberts explains. “What we’re looking for is the best substitute out there. . . . Because of this, you eventually could see a big shift in our industry.”

Clarion has estimated that stabilizing the quality of its products across both plants will be worth roughly \$1.75 million to the company annually. The impact of a new fiber source is not yet known.

Roberts, for his part, finds value in the way CIRAS has helped Clarion begin making evidence-based decisions.

“One of the restrictions we have in getting better is just the fact that there’s not a lot of expert knowledge out there,” Roberts said. “Being able to use the resources of the university has let us use analytics to make sure that what we’re doing is correct.”

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— Damond Roberts

➤ For more information, contact Derek Thompson at [thompson@iastate.edu](mailto:thompson@iastate.edu) or 515-419-2163.

# Kreg Tool Finds That Metal-Additive Mold Means Quicker, Cooler Production

Switching to new 3D-printed molds for creating one of its more popular products stands to save Kreg Tool at least \$20,000 annually in reduced production costs, the company estimates.

Earlier this summer, Kreg Tool Company, in Huxley, began manufacturing some of its K5 jigs using a mold insert made via CIRAS' metal additive manufacturing machine. The 3D-printed tool, which went through various iterations over the course of roughly a year, now allows the company to keep better control of temperatures during the production process and eliminate several heat-related steps. Kreg therefore is now able to make products more quickly and reallocate workers who once were required to handle the jigs as they cooled.

"From everything I've learned through this process, I think obviously it's a viable technology," Brian Hill, senior industrial

engineer at Kreg, said of the new mold insert. "I think as they advance and are able to print in different materials, then it's only going to get that much better."

The key lies in the speed of production.

"An injection molder basically is a money-printing machine," Hill said. "We put plastic pellets in, and every time that mold opens, it's something we can turn into cash. So the faster we can make the part fall out, the more money we can make. Anything that can improve our productivity is something that can improve our cash flow."

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— Brian Hill

The 3D printer improved Kreg's production process by creating new, curved channels in the mold for water to more evenly cool the hot plastic. Traditional production methods—drilling a straight-line hole—don't allow for water to cool all parts of the mold equally, Hill said. That means some parts of the product get, and stay, much hotter than the rest of the product, thereby creating the potential for warping.

Until now, Kreg has safeguarded against potential problems by keeping new jigs in their molds slightly longer, then moving them to special cooling fixtures that hold them in place until cooling is complete. "Now that's one less operation in the plant that we have to staff," Hill said. "We can reallocate that labor to some other project."

Chris Hill, director of CIRAS' Technology Assistance Program (and no relation to Brian), said CIRAS has many more projects in the works to help Iowa companies discover what is or isn't practical as far as using additive manufacturing in their businesses. "The goal is to find the most efficient and cost-effective way to do this," he said. "It's all about finding the best use of time and money."



**Above:** A mold machine holds the new insert produced with CIRAS' metal 3D printer. **Below:** The Kreg K5 jig.

➤ For more information about additive manufacturing, contact Chris Hill, director of CIRAS' Technology Assistance Program, at [chhill@iastate.edu](mailto:chhill@iastate.edu) or 515-294-5416.

# American Coating and Welding Growing Rapidly—With CIRAS by Its Side

*CIRAS government contracting specialist Andy Alexander was eating breakfast in downtown Onawa one morning in 2014 when he suddenly came face-to-face with the aspirations of a Monona County sheriff's deputy.*

"He walked in and wanted to know if that was my government car out there," Alexander recalls. "I thought he was going to give me a ticket."

Instead, Deputy Randy Lee (below) started chatting about his interest in powder coating metal. Lee, who spent a yearlong stint serving with a U.S. Army engineering unit in Afghanistan, was searching for a way to work for himself.

What followed that breakfast meeting was more than two years of in-depth mentorship, as Alexander and CIRAS project manager Mark Reinig guided Lee through everything from forming the company that became American Coating and Welding to finding a location for the business and making connections that helped Lee land work.

In February, U.S. Senator Joni Ernst visited American Coating to thank Lee for his service and to tout his company as an example of a successful, hardworking small business.

In addition to powder coating metal furniture and granite blasting old equipment, American Coating also fabricates parts for race cars and makes Circle R bed extenders for pickups.

"I feel strongly about where it's headed," Lee said earlier this year. "We are moving forward in a lot of different areas. . . . Andy has helped us a lot."

CIRAS' involvement with the company began shortly after Lee sought advice from Teresa Miller, then-president of the Monona County Economic Development Partnership for Growth. Reinig said Miller called him for help "because most economic developers know you go to CIRAS if you have a manufacturer that's looking to get going."

Alexander later helped connect Lee with special preference programs created to give military veterans a leg up with government contracting. Alexander, a former U.S. Army Ranger, since has served as a sounding board for many of Lee's business decisions. Lee has taken more than a half dozen CIRAS training

classes, including one focused on helping companies develop a business plan.

American Coating so far has done only small-scale business with the government, including welcome signs for the city of Onawa and work on dump trucks for Monona County and the local Iowa Department of Transportation office. But CIRAS-arranged connections also have led to work for Sioux City Foundry, Missouri Valley Steel, and Peck Manufacturing. Lee is confident that more will develop once he proves that his company has staying power

"There's a lot of paperwork, a lot of hoops to jump through just to understand what they're even talking about," Lee said. "I can easily say that we would not be where we are with the government contracting without your guys' program."



➤ For more information, contact Andy Alexander at [andyalex@iastate.edu](mailto:andyalex@iastate.edu) or 403-547-0333.

## Clark Boats Uses GSA Schedule to Buoy Government Sales



Kristy Carrier (left) looked around one day and realized she was drowning.

Clark Boat Company, a small watercraft firm in Bellevue, started in 1960 as a maker of commercial fishing vehicles and weekend pontoon boats. But time shifted the company toward a focus on selling tailor-made boats to government agencies.

Carrier, the founders' daughter, took control four years ago and realized she had no idea how things worked.

"I was lost," she said. "I used to have a porcelain doll business. Then, my parents passed away, and I end up running the boat business. That's quite a switch."

Today, roughly 70 percent of Clark's sales come off something called the GSA Schedule—essentially an ordering agreement for preapproved businesses that's maintained by the U.S. General Services Administration to streamline federal government shopping.

"On the whole, it's similar to Amazon," said Beth White, a government contracting specialist with CIRAS'

Procurement Technical Assistance Program (PTAP). "It's a store with many aisles, each containing different products or services. If you sell a particular product that's in one of those aisles, you can submit a proposal. Then, the government reviews it all and decides, 'Yes, you're OK to sell in our store.'

"Just because you're on the shelves, though, doesn't mean anyone will ever buy your product or service."

Carrier now regularly uses CIRAS' help to market and maintain the schedule, including pricing adjustments. "Without you guys helping us, I would have been in trouble. Because you can't find people who understand GSA in a small town."

General Services Administration schedules can be valuable tools for some businesses, White said. But she urges companies to seek guidance from CIRAS before they pursue one.

"It can be a great tool, but not every company is like Clark Boats," White said. "CIRAS can help you figure out whether the GSA schedule is right for the needs of your business."

➤ **For more information, contact Beth White at [whiteb@iastate.edu](mailto:whiteb@iastate.edu) or 563-370-2166.**

## Engineering K-12 Community Outreach Helps Manufacturers Focus Message

*Every year, from fall through spring, Camille Sloan Schroeder scours the state to find the more than 1,000 volunteers necessary to operate FIRST LEGO League and other STEM-promoting programs.*

One of the ways she finds them is by helping Iowa manufacturers get the most out of getting involved.

"Sometimes it really helps if we can sit down with a core group from a business and say, 'What do you want out of your philanthropy in terms of time and resources?'" said Schroeder, program manager for K-12 Community Outreach in Iowa State's College of Engineering.

"What's this look like to you? What do you want from your employees? Is it important for you to engage in schools?"

By exploring the options, Schroeder can help manufacturers get comfortable with community involvement and maximize their reputation with potential future workers.

Engineers sometimes don't understand how to connect with teachers and students, and they emphasize the wrong thing—such as talking up potential manufacturing salaries, Schroeder said. Research shows students are more focused on careers that are interesting and important.

"We can kind of veer companies away from the pitfalls and maximize their engagement strategies."

In return, Schroeder's program solicits company help with FLL teams or providing speakers for classrooms that use Project Lead the Way, a STEM-promoting school curriculum.

If everything works correctly, she said, companies, schools, and students all benefit. "And everyone will know that Iowa State is a great resource and destination."

➤ **For more information, contact Camille Sloan Schroeder at [camilles@iastate.edu](mailto:camilles@iastate.edu) or 515-294-4293.**

# Interstate Migration of Skilled Workers by Liesl Eathington

Iowa employers continue to share concerns about tightening labor markets for workers with specific skill sets. In particular, a so-called “middle-skill” worker shortage has garnered attention here and in many other states. This article examines recent interstate migration flows of middle- and higher-skill workers to discern how Iowa is faring against other states.<sup>1</sup>

Attempts to stratify jobs by skill level often focus on their required levels of education or training and experience. The U.S. Labor Department’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA) provides a convenient tool for classifying jobs along these dimensions with a “Job Zone” schema in its O\*NET occupational database. Job Zones 1–5 describe general preparation levels, ranging from little or no preparation required for Zone 1 jobs to extensive preparation necessary for Zone 5.

While “middle skill” is open to wide interpretation, Zone 3 seems to fit colloquial usage of the term. Most Zone 3 occupations require training via vocational schools, apprenticeships, licensing examinations, related on-the-job experience, or an associate’s degree. Examples of Zone 3 occupations include electricians, agricultural and engineering technicians, paralegals, medical assistants, and many production occupations such as the following:

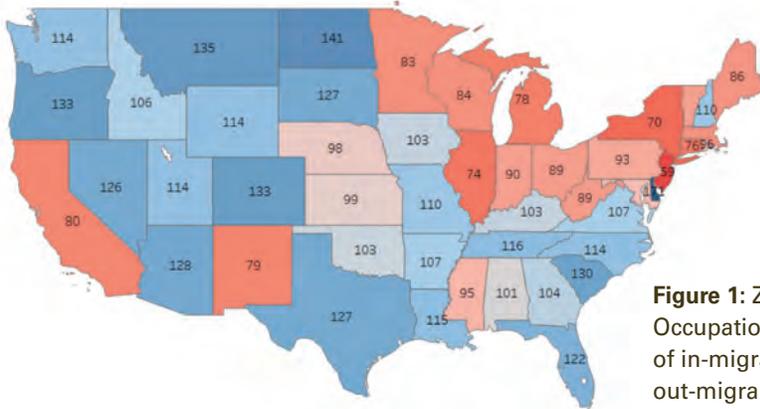
- Computer-controlled and computer-numerically controlled machine tool operators
- Machinists
- Welders, cutters, and welder fitters
- Medical appliance technicians

Figure 1 illustrates the ratio of middle-skill in-migrants to out-migrants by state. The labels indicate the number of in-migrants per 100 out-migrants whose self-reported occupation falls within Zone 3. Iowa is among the states experiencing overall net inflows of middle-skill workers. From 2010 to 2014, Iowa attracted 103 in-migrants for every 100 out-migrants in these occupations. North Dakota, South Dakota, and Missouri all experienced slightly higher Zone 3 worker exchange rates. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois fared worse.

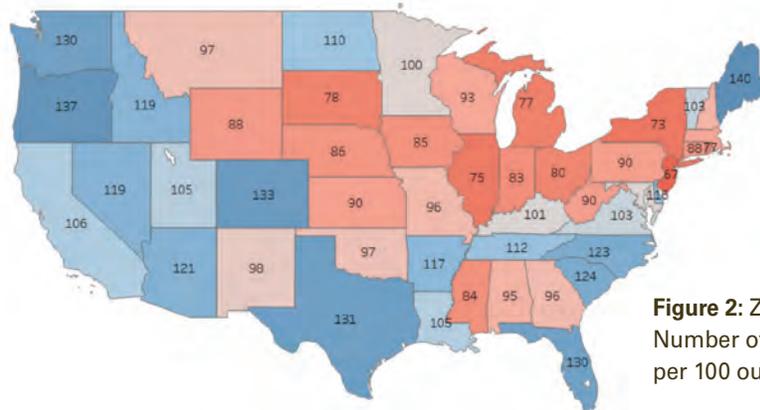
Figure 2 illustrates net migration patterns of higher-skilled workers whose occupations are rated as Zone 4 or 5. Jobs in Zone 4 typically require a four-year college degree and considerable on-the-job training or related work experience. Most Zone 5 occupations require graduate school and may also require additional years of specialized training, as in the case of physicians. Iowa fares much worse in its net exchanges of these higher-skilled workers, gaining only 85 in-migrants per 100 out-migrants. Among midwestern states, only North Dakota enjoyed a net inflow of high-skilled workers in recent years.

With near-term growth in Iowa’s labor supply constrained by its demographic

structure and its already high labor participation rates, the competition for skilled workers in Iowa likely will intensify. Proposed education and training programs to address emerging skill demands are desirable both socially and economically; however, they require planning and substantial public and private investment. In the shorter term, attracting skilled workers from other states and countries represents an attractive solution for employers. Whereas much attention has focused on middle-skill workers, recent interstate migration patterns suggest that Iowa faces even greater challenges in attracting and retaining higher-skilled workers.



**Figure 1:** Zone 3 Occupations—Number of in-migrants per 100 out-migrants, 2010–2014



**Figure 2:** Zones 4–5—Number of in-migrants per 100 out-migrants

<sup>1</sup> Source: Public Use Microdata Sample Files from the 2011–2015 American Community Survey.

## Joe Meier

Every so often (starting now), CIRAS intends to take a moment and tell you a little bit about the people who make Iowa businesses better. First up: Joe Meier, who started out as a sea-savvy machinist and worked his way to becoming vice president of operations for fast-growing Geater Machining & Manufacturing Co. in Independence.



**NAME:** Joe Meier  
**EMPLOYER:** Geater Machining & Manufacturing  
**NUMBER OF COWORKERS:** 330  
**JOB TITLE:** VP of Operations  
**FAMILY:** Wife, Nanci; Two sons

### ■ Explain your job.

I am responsible for operations, engineering, maintenance, and quality. I handle capital purchases—setting rates, projections, business strategies, budgeting, and labor projections. I sit on Geater’s Advisory Board, as well as the management and senior leadership teams.

### ■ How did you get started in Iowa industry?

By way of the Naval Reserves. I joined in 1986 and went to boot camp between my junior and senior years at Wapsie Valley High School. After graduation, I attended Builder Sea Bee Training in California, then picked up a machinist degree. I started working as a machinist for Doerfer Engineering in 1988 and took night classes until I received a bachelor’s degree in business. I joined Geater as machining manager in 2005, became plant manager in 2007, then vice president of operations in 2011. The company has more than tripled in size since I’ve been here.

### ■ How has the industry changed?

Technology. Computers give us a lot more data. We make decisions much faster today than we did 30 years ago.

### ■ Boil it down. What’s the key to success?

Hire great people that you trust, stay out of their way, and let them do their jobs.

### ■ If you could change one thing about business in Iowa, what would it be?

I would get more machines into junior and senior high schools. Set them up with CNC equipment, robotics, etc., so they can learn about the opportunities that exist in advanced manufacturing—and the advanced education it requires.

**Know someone worthy of being recognized as a Face of Iowa Industry? Email [eckhoffj@iastate.edu](mailto:eckhoffj@iastate.edu).**

## Clock Ticking to Make Transition to ISO 9001:2015

Iowa’s ISO-certified manufacturers face a looming deadline that many aren’t completely ready for, experts say.

A long-known change in certification requirements is going to become mandatory next September.

“Most Iowa manufacturers were slow to get started,” said CIRAS project manager Rudy Pruszko. “But they’re moving now.”

ISO 9001 is an international collection of yardsticks that organizations can use to measure and demonstrate their ability to consistently manage the quality of their products and services. Becoming ISO 9001-certified can be expensive and time consuming, but it also can go a long way toward proving a firm’s worth to large customers.

“With the new standard, they don’t dictate that you have to document. They do dictate that you have a process, and you have to be able to show that the process is working.”

— Rudy Pruszko

“There are a lot of small companies that go this route because customers or potential new customers go to them and say, ‘We’re not going to buy from you unless you get ISO-certified,’” Pruszko said.

Aware that some companies see ISO certification as essential, CIRAS in June held several informational events about the changes. CIRAS experts expect to provide more help in 2018 to any individual company that’s continuing to have concerns.

Changes in the newest version of ISO 9001, which were announced in 2015, include an increased focus on companies having a process in place to assess and deal with current and future risks.

“With the new standard, they don’t dictate that you have to have a quality manual,” Pruszko said. “They do dictate that you have a process, and you have to be able to show that the process is working.”

Experts say the transition process shouldn’t be technically difficult—but neither will it happen overnight.

Once ISO-certified companies have made the switch, they likely will find the new version “a nice change,” said Rob Taylor, an ISO consultant who works through the Iowa Quality Center. “If anything, it helps them plan and do things that they ought to do anyway.”

➤ **For more information, contact Rudy Pruszko at [rpruszko@iastate.edu](mailto:rpruszko@iastate.edu) or 563-599-0645.**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Better Process Control School**  
November 13–16, 2017  
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Ames
- **Future of Leadership Summit**  
November 16, 2017  
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Meadows Events and Conference Center, Altoona
- **Subcontracting Opportunities**  
November 21, 2017  
9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.  
Webinar
- **GovCon 101**  
December 12, 2017  
9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.  
Webinar

For more information on these and other similar events, please visit [www.ciras.iastate.edu/events.asp](http://www.ciras.iastate.edu/events.asp).

## FOR THE RECORD

The cornerstones of CIRAS' support structure were renewed by separate government agencies this summer in moves that mean CIRAS will continue to maintain access to its vast network of expertise. The U.S. Defense Logistics Agency in July renewed CIRAS as Iowa's local Procurement Technical Assistance Center. CIRAS will receive roughly \$600,000 during fiscal 2018. The money will be matched with CIRAS funds to provide \$1.2 million of assistance to Iowa businesses in navigating the world of government contracting.

The Economic Development Administration also renewed CIRAS' funding for its Iowa University Center Economic Development Program. The \$250,000 award will be combined with matching CIRAS funds to create a program budget of \$500,000.

Early this year, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) reaffirmed CIRAS as the Iowa affiliate of NIST's Manufacturing Extension Partnership. CIRAS is slated to receive \$9 million in federal funding over the next five years. Combined with CIRAS funds, that will create a five-year program budget of roughly \$18.6 million.

## STAFF NEWS



### Cox to Step Down as Associate Dean

CIRAS director Ron Cox is returning to the job full time. Cox, CIRAS director since 2001, also has served for the past eight years as associate dean for corporate engagement in Iowa State University's College of Engineering. He intends to vacate his engineering role by December 31.

Cox, who previously spent two years as assistant vice president of ISU Extension, sparked administrative initiatives that saved several million dollars by finding greater efficiency in college facilities and human resources processes, among other things. During Cox's tenure, CIRAS also has grown more involved in promoting the hiring of Iowa State students and managing the contracts for capstone student projects. All those efforts will continue.

Cox said he plans to spend more time helping develop new economic development policies and speaking with others about ways to improve Iowa's economy.



### Kimberly Anderson—Project Manager

Kimberly Anderson has joined CIRAS and Iowa State Agricultural and Natural Resources Extension as a project manager overseeing food safety and quality programs inside the Iowa companies that make, process, and/or handle human or animal food. Her appointment is shared between CIRAS and the ANR Program Iowa Grain Quality Initiative. This includes programming related to the federal Food Safety Modernization Act and other certification schemes. Kim has a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Wyoming and a master's degree in public health from Drexel University. She comes to CIRAS after spending four years as an investigator/consumer safety officer with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and two years as a consultant. Her work at the FDA included manufacturing inspections, medical devices, infant formula, and food recalls.

## CIRAS Shows ADA Enterprises How to Build for the Future

A Northwood, Iowa-based manufacturer of pig and calf flooring and commercial outdoor furniture should see a major boost to its production capacity because of a CIRAS-assisted expansion of its production plant.

Thomas Stensrud, president of ADA Enterprises, said his company's recently remodeled and expanded footprint should provide 20 years of growth for the maker of park furniture and plastic-coated pork-industry flooring. "We plan on at least doubling or even tripling our capacity," he said.

ADA Enterprises first approached CIRAS in 2011 about testing a new coating process as a prerequisite to the expansion. Construction began in September 2016. CIRAS experts helped both in testing the coating process—to make sure it economically created a more attractive and durable product—and with designing the layout of the new factory floor.

CIRAS project managers Shankar Srinivasan and John Roberts "helped me to test what the new facility would do," Stensrud said, "and we proved that it would work."

"This allowed them to basically double the number of weld stations and put a better (plastic) coating line in, as well as to develop a better system for staging material," said CIRAS project manager Jim Poe. "The whole process now will flow much better."

Stensrud said the new machines will save ADA money because they will be more environmentally friendly, and "we won't be as wasteful with energy as we were."

Stensrud said he turned to CIRAS for help after several years of working with the center on successful projects, including training on internet marketing and the Theory of Constraints. "We've done a number of different programs through CIRAS, and they've all worked well," he said.

➤ For more information, contact Mike O'Donnell at [modonnll@iastate.edu](mailto:modonnll@iastate.edu) or 515-509-4379.

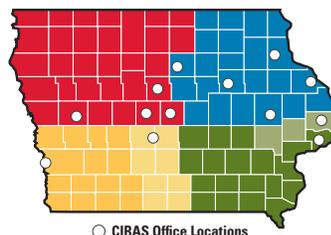
ADA's expansion is the lighter colored portion of the building below.



## CIRAS Engage. Educate. Embed.

Since 1963, we have delivered proven services to enhance the performance of industry. Our approach—Engage. Educate. Embed.—creates specific solutions that allow each business and its community to prosper and grow. Coupled with a satisfaction guarantee, our typical client has achieved a 200% ROI. Clients have reported an economic impact of more than \$2 billion over the past five years.

**Find your county to find your best introduction to CIRAS.** In addition to four regional account managers, CIRAS has six regional government contracting specialists,\* a statewide account manager for the food industry, and one for economic development. More staff information can be found at [www.ciras.iastate.edu/staff.asp](http://www.ciras.iastate.edu/staff.asp).



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- Des Moines Area Community College
- Iowa Area Development Group
- Iowa Association of Business and Industry
- Iowa Business Council
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- Iowa Innovation Corporation
- Iowa Lean Consortium
- Iowa Sustainable Business Forum
- North Iowa Area Community College
- Northeast Iowa Community College
- Quad Cities Manufacturing Innovation Hub

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## *GROWING YOUR BUSINESS*

### All-Small Mentor-Protégé Program Opens New Doors for Businesses

*Small businesses that sell products or services to the government received a new tool for growth last fall when the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) launched its new All-Small Mentor-Protégé Program.*

The program, which expanded on capabilities that previously existed for Certified 8(a) disadvantaged businesses, essentially put all small businesses on a higher level of competitiveness by making them viable bidders for larger-scale federal contracts.

The All-Small Mentor-Protégé Program allows smaller companies to join with larger firms and receive developmental assistance from their mentors. In addition, the companies can form joint ventures to bid on set-aside contracts.

The SBA goal with this program was to help small firms develop in a way that prepares them for larger and more complex contracts in the future. The relationship also may help larger companies gain the ability to bid on small business opportunities or the benefit (on future federal evaluations) of having a protégé that's been awarded subcontracts.

Some smaller companies may find benefit, however, in bypassing the larger firms and taking another small business as a mentor—especially if that business has

demonstrated success in the federal marketplace or in an industry that the protégé has targeted for expansion.

If you're thinking of pursuing this process, start by assessing your current business network and determining who already is involved in government contracting. (Or, sit down with CIRAS to get help reviewing your options.)

Once you select a possible partner, make sure that both parties are registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) at [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov).

Both sides of the agreement will need to review the SBA's sample Mentor-Protégé Agreement. You'll also need to discuss areas for focus and development of the protégé and how that will fit in with the protégé's stated business goals (which will have to be submitted to the SBA as part of the program application).

Once everyone is on the same page, complete the application process at <https://certify.sba.gov/>.

Then it's time to start assessing federal contracting opportunities as a team—hopefully with a much higher potential for success than your company would have had alone.

➤ **For more information, contact Julie Fagle at [jafagle@iastate.edu](mailto:jafagle@iastate.edu) or 319-310-8612.**