To find out we spoke with several employees—managers, welders, engineers, folks who work the line. What we discovered was a drive fueled by a pride in their creations, employees eager to learn and try new approaches, and—perhaps above all—a connection to agriculture. In fact, many of the Jackson staff come from farm families or are farmers themselves; they apply lessons they've learned working the land to the equipment they help design and produce.

These men and women told us they consider it paramount to build the highest quality equipment, allowing the North American farmer to become all the more efficient and productive. They make equipment that helps producers make a living *and* make it home in time for the dinner.

Farmers Work Here

John and Andy Peterson lead two lives. They work at AGCO's Jackson plant, where Andy is a maintenance group leader, tending to many of the plant's high-tech machines, while brother John is the director of engineering for global electronics.

But those are their day jobs.

When they're not at the plant, you'll probably find them farming about 700 acres just north of town. They're the fifth generation to do so—now growing corn, soybeans, alfalfa, and even sunflowers some years—and the second to work both jobs. Like their father, Sylvan, who worked as a machinist at the plant until he retired about 3 years ago, they take lessons learned on the farm back to the plant.

"When we turn off the lights," says John Peterson, "and put our jackets on at the end of the day, we're going home to get into a piece of equipment or turn on a piece of electronics, like auto steering or a yield monitor. The lessons we learn in that environment, you can't help but bring them back to work and incorporate them into the product. An understanding to that level, the dirt under your fingernails, I think gains a respect when dealing with customers or dealing with co-workers in the plant. It allows us to make a better piece of equipment."

Excellence on the Line

Such hard-won knowledge and the desire to constantly improve equipment and how it's made have been hallmarks of the Jackson plant, which has long been the site of assembly for TerraGator and RoGator applicators, SpraCoupe row-crop sprayers, and Challenger tractors. The market for each of those vehicles is extremely competitive, yet the plant's management and its employees have managed to best their brand rivals with improved performance—by their own measures on the factory floor, and in how well the equipment they makes works in the field.

JOHN AND ANDY PETERSON: "One of the things our enterprise has had to focus on, especially because we work, is efficiency," says John Peterson. "We're relatively small in the scheme of things, but the guys who are farming 2,000, 3,000, 5,000, 20,000 acres are facing those same issues, just for different reasons." Above: John (left) and Andy on their farm. Longtime Challenger users, they're now looking to add Massey Ferguson tractors to their operation. Below, Andy and John at the plant.

Now, says Dave Dehrkoop, who oversees tooling and technology for the plant, that tenaciousness has been rewarded with the addition of the Massey Ferguson tractors. That means more jobs for workers in the area, as well as tractors made by one of the most proven manufacturing facilities in the country.

"We've been extremely innovative here," says Dehrkoop, a self-described "farm kid" from Waterloo, Iowa. In addition to adopting a streamlined manufacturing process and allowing self-directed work teams to develop their own innovative ideas, Dehrkoop points to the use of new robotic technology for machining and welding, as well as using a leading-edge, virtual reality simulator as part of its training for human welders. AGCO is one of the first welding facilities to adopt the simulator, and the Jackson plant has already seen significant savings of time, money