The 1990s saw a remarkable evolution of information and communications technology (ICT) amid rapid technological innovation, which in turn drove major changes in societies and lifestyles.

The resulting ripples spread to every corner of the industrial world, and the farming sector was no exception.

New initiatives began for farm management utilizing ICT and other advanced technologies—something that is now known as precision farming.

It is estimated that the world population will top 9.8 billion by 2050, generating growing concern over shortages of food.

Precision farming is a trump card that can help to resolve the world's food problems.

In Japan's rice farming market, Kubota became the first in the industry to introduce precision farming, which Kubota refers to as “smart farming.”

Furthermore, Kubota has recently commenced initiatives for precision farming in Europe's upland farming market.

Kubota has started taking on new challenges to resolve the world’s food problems as it aims to become a “Global Major Brand” (“GMB”).

The Netherlands is a country of water and bicycles. This is because one-quarter of its land area is flat reclaimed land and the government put considerable effort into developing bike trails (photo: Amsterdam).
What is “Precision Farming”?
A look at precision farming in the Netherlands today

The Netherlands is a country known for its agricultural output in the fields of cereal crops and vegetable cultivation, with a land area of approximately 41,800 km². The country’s farming sector is highly competitive and innovative, with some of its largest export items being tulips and other flowering plants. The Netherlands is one of the world’s leading agricultural exporters, with its exports free of duty, targeting countries such as China, the U.S., and the EU.

The Netherlands is also a leader in precision farming, a management strategy that uses information technologies to acquire and analyze data on crop production, and supports decision-making by scientifically calculating how factors are related. Precision farming is known as a “smart farming” approach in Europe, making the most of its small land area, the country focuses on farming techniques that maximize revenues even for farming. Its farm produce is exported primarily to the European Union market.

Overview of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in the Netherlands
(excerpts from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan website)

The average farm area is 0.274 km², with one-quarter of its land area being reclaimed (or 18,400 km²). Making the most of its small land area, the country focuses on farming techniques that maximize revenues even for farming. Its farm produce is exported primarily to the European Union market.

Higher yield/quality, lower environmental load

Precision farming boosts productivity through higher yield/quality, lower environmental load, and supports decision-making by scientifically calculating how factors are related. The Home-Grown Food and Fibre Policy (HGFPP) of the Netherlands is one of its key project themes. We were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview Dr. Corné Kempenaar, who studies precision farming at Wageningen University & Research.

Expanding the future of food, water and the environment.

The world’s 2nd largest agricultural exporter – What makes the Netherlands farming so competitive?

The Netherlands is an extensive network of canals.

Precision farming is essential for sustainable agriculture.

Precision farming is essential for sustainable agriculture.

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Precision farming is essential for sustainable agriculture.
**Precision Farming**

**According to Kubota**

Putting smart farming into practice

Creating new values through innovative solutions to support farm management by utilizing data and automating farming machinery

**Shunichi Semba**, Director and Senior Managing Executive Officer, President and General Manager of Research and Development Headquarters of the Kubota Corporation

Around 2011, Kubota became the first farm machinery manufacturer in Japan to begin studying precision farming. This proactive initiative was based on the belief that, in May 2014, when Kubota announced the creation of the Kverneland Smart Agriculture System (KSAS), which supports farmers to achieve more efficient production. As indicated by the system's name, Kubota had already set its sights on "smart farming," which includes precision farming. While precision farming can be defined as a farming management technique that utilizes data by way of ICT and IoT to increase operational efficiency, smart farming supports farm management by combining such data utilization with the automation of farm machinery. Satoshi Iida, who serves as Director, Senior Managing Executive Officer, and General Manager of the Research and Development Headquarters, explains the rationale behind Kubota's commitment to smart farming, which he plays a central role in promoting.

"In Japan, while the farming population has considerably dwindled and aged, the number of professional farmers who manage land areas of 0.05 km² or more, who are referred to as certified farmers, is on the rise, with the result that farmland is becoming concentrated and larger in scale. It is said that the percentage of farmland managed by certified farmers among the total farming area will increase from the current 58% to reach 80% by 2023. As farmland concentration accelerates and the labor force decreases, farmers are faced with a diverse array of challenges, including appropriate management of multiple fields, improvement of yield and quality of crops, reduction of production costs, and the need to add extra value to their produce. In response, Kubota aims to create new value by delivering solutions focusing on farm management support through greater use of data and utilization of labor through automation of farm machinery."

Satoshi Iida
Director and Senior Managing Executive Officer, concurrently General Manager of Research and Development Headquarters

The centerpiece of farm management support through active use of data is the aforementioned KSAS. The basic architecture of the KSAS connects PCs and smartphones with farm machinery via cloud service to manage every single piece of overall farming information in an integrated manner. By accumulating and analyzing multiple types of information on fields, crops, and farm operations that are collected from farmland, farm management can be "visualized." This not only helps to reduce operational errors—it also reveals information on input of fertilizers and other chemicals, thereby allowing costs to be lowered. One feature of the KSAS that merits special attention is the "Smart-Path" function. This state-of-the-art farm machine simultaneously measures the yield and nutritional components of crops in each field and enters such information into a database as it performs harvesting and threshing.

"The taste of rice is determined by protein and water content, and so we equipped our combine harvester with a sensor that measures these nutritional components. The sensor allows monitoring of variances in the yield, protein, and water content in each field. Based on the data, fertilizer application can be optimized, which then helps to produce high-quality, delicious rice. If the data on fertilizer application design are transmitted to farming machines, the machines automatically set the application rate, making it possible for anyone to apply fertilizers easily according to plan. This marks a departure from conventional farming techniques, which relied on farmers' experiences and intuition." (Iida)

In addition to this data-driven farm management support, the other key initiative of automated farm machinery is well under way. The first phase in this regard is auto-steering. In September 2016, Kubota released a rice transplanter with the "Smart-Path" function, followed by a tractor equipped with the auto-steering function. There are technical difficulties in having a rice transplanter maintain a straight line in paddy fields, and existing auto-steering equipment was expensive and unable to do the job. Therefore, Kubota came up with an original control system that combines an inexpensive DGPS unit with an Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU), thereby creating a mechanism capable of automatically controlling the vehicle with high accuracy (10 cm margin of error for every 100 m straight movement). The current plan is to release automated, unmanned farm machinery (with human supervision) from 2020 onward. In June 2017, toward the ultimate goal of running completely unmanned, remote-controlled machines. Meanwhile, monitoring of drones for spray ing chemicals has begun as one of the initiatives for saving labor and reducing the work burden.

Kubota's entry into the European upland farming market and partnership with an implement manufacturer

Having declared its commitment to solution of the world's food issues, Kubota has embarked upon global initiatives for smart farming by tapping into the knowledge it has gained through farm management support provided to rice farmers in Japan. While precision farming (or "smart farming") is expected to solve food-related issues stemming from the explosive increase of the world population, as it helps to increase yields and operational efficiency, Kubota has targeted the European upland farming market, which includes France, Germany, and the Netherlands. With the commencement of production and sales of the M7001 Series of large-sized tractors for upland farming in France in 2015, Kubota made a full-scale entry into the European upland farming market. The key components behind this strategy are the presence of the Kverneland Group (hereinafter "KVG"), a specialist implement manufacturer that joined the Kubota Group in 2012. Implements include different types of operating equipment pulled by tractors. For farmers, the crucial point when evaluating farming machinery is determining whether the machines can achieve efficient and accurate farm operations. In other words, they rate farming machinery that achieves higher yields at lower costs. This can be realized only when the tractor, which is the power source, and the implement that performs the task are able to be united together to work as one. Implement manufacturing represents an important key for Kubota's penetration into the European upland farming market in Europe. Kubota's smart farming there is being promoted through collaboration with implements. Kubota and the KVG are constantly working together to promote smart farming in Europe.
Kubota Working at the Forefront of Precision Farming in Europe

R&D in the Netherlands

Kubota is a newcomer to the European upland farming market, but its Group implement manufacturer, KVG, has long made its presence known as a force in Europe, but also in the international market. As present, Kubota and KVG are working together to enhance the concept of smart farming, and one of these projects is to exchange information between a tractor and an implement for integrated control that achieves higher efficiency and lower cost farming. Having a tractor and an implement share the operational data, such as driving speed and number of engine revolutions, makes agricultural work more convenient and comfortable. When bulling hay, for instance, the driving speed of a tractor and other parameters can be optimized by determining what the tractor needs to do based on the operating conditions of a baler, and having the implement communicating such data to the tractor. In the case of mowers for cutting grass, the operations of the implement are able to optimally be controlled based on the operational status of the tractor, in order to avoid moving the same area twice. Through such “tractors-implements” combinations, Kubota is making even greater efforts to achieve the optimization of farming.

Diffusion of the ISOBUS International communications standard is essential for the realization of smart farming

The key to information communications between tractors and implements is an international standard called ISOBUS. Conceived specifically for linking tractors with implements of any brand, ISOBUS is a globally shared communications standard. It was KVG that came up with the idea of ISOBUS, and it played the central role in developing the standard. One of the key individuals responsible for making this happen was Ton van der Voort van der Kley, who is currently Business Development Director at KVG Mechatronics BV.

“ISOBUS, information must be globally shared communications standard. It was KVG that came up with the idea of ISOBUS, and it played the central role in developing the standard. One of the key individuals responsible for making this happen was Ton van der Voort van der Kley, who is currently Business Development Director at KVG Mechatronics BV.

In the words of Peter van der Vlugt, CTD, Kverneland Group Mechatronics BV: “With the growing world population, it is necessary to increase food production using limited resources. Under such circumstances, smart farming practices will play an important role, as they are intended to achieve higher efficiency and lower cost farming. This basis up perfectly with the Kubota Group’s grand business concept of ‘Smart, Efficient, Easy Farming’. You could say that living up to these slogans is truly smart farming.”

Development efforts are also being accelerated on the Japanese side. One such project involves the development of sensors, in which Kubota has a high degree of technological prowess. “To further develop precision farming, it is necessary to utilize GPS and have information systems that collect and manage various types of data. We are working hard on advanced research projects to facilitate the use of the growth sensors that are built into such systems.” (Hiroyuki Araki, Manager, First Development Section, Instrumentation and Control Technology Center)

For example, rather than working field-by-field, in order to enable even more precise segmentation of one tract of land into smaller fields, (i.e., mapping, appropriate fertilizer application and agricultural chemical distribution, irrigation, and other activities, accurate measuring (that is, monitoring) and control of farm machinery easier and more convenient.” (Hiroyuki Araki, Manager, First Development Section, Instrumentation and Control Technology Center)
Kubota’s Technology Supports Precision Farming

Marketing in Europe

A s mentioned earlier, in 2015, Kubota made its full entry into European upland farming market in France by commencing manufacturing and sales of the large tractors. The M7001 Series. Kubota is also developing the market for smart farming in Europe by offering solutions that combine the M7001 Series with implements supplied by KVG. More recently, Kubota has launched a new strategy to dramatically change its approach to the European market. In October 2017, Kubota Holdings Europe BV was established in the Netherlands with a view toward achieving optimal results in the machinery segment in Europe. Since the establishment of Kubota Europe S.A.S. in France in 1974, Kubota has steadily expanded its European machinery business in France, Germany, the U.K., and in Spain by establishing subsidiaries that manufacture and distribute farm machinery, construction machinery, and engines. This new initiative marks an about-face for its European marketing strategy, since the business is managed by segment, rather than by country as it was in the past. The president of this new company is Dai Watanabe: Kubota’s Managing Executive Officer and concurrently the General Manager of the Agricultural Implement Division and also the CEO of KVG.

“The reason of establishing this regional headquarters for our machinery business was to increase the efficiency and viability of our organization in Europe by aligning all of our business units together,” he said. “We are looking closely at European upland farming market, but the hard truth is that, as a newcomer to the market, recognition of Kubota brand is not very high. In European market, the Kubota brand has gained wide recognition for distinctive compact tractors, but the main player in the upland farming market is large tractors. For that reason, our immediate task is to increase our recognition by promoting sales of the M7001 Series. Therefore, we are working to empower the Kubota brand by streamlining our sales network as ‘borderless’.”

Introducing smart farming to the European market through the “tractors + implements” solution

N ow that a new organizational setup is in place, efforts to expand sales in the smart farming market are being orchestrated by the farm machinery segment, which offers the combined solution of “tractors + implements,” rather than offering the M7001 Series with implements on a national market. The potential behind this strategy is in the EU Agricultural Business Unit, which is a cross-functional team of members from Kubota’s business units in Europe. Michael Provost is the product manager responsible for the introduction of tractors for farming use. Based in France, he currently plays a prominent role in promoting sales of the M7001 Series for the entire European market by promoting regional sales strategies.

“Since its release in 2015, the M7001 Series, which comprises the first large tractors from Kubota, has been widely gaining in sales. We often hear our users say that the M7001 Series is simple and easy to use, and offers high operational efficiency. They also say they like its good compatibility with implements and its excellent operability.”

Their approach to the smart farming market in Europe has already begun with the “M7001 Series tractors + implements” combination. It is equipped with a suction control function for prevention of double spraying, a variable rate control function for determining the amount of fertilizers and other materials being fed depending on the soil conditions, as well as an auto-steering function for automatic operation. All of this has been made possible through ISOBUS- enabled data communication between tractors and implements.

“Expanding the future of food, water and the environment.

The “Kubota Farm Solution” for any farm management issue

“E mphasis on Kubota’s originality is important,” says Andreas Kosmerzyk, Marketing Manager of the EU Agricultural Business Unit.

“Whether it be in upland farming or precision farming, Kubota is a newcomer in the European market,” he noted. “As, the crucial question is, how we can distinguish ourselves from the other players who arrived before us?” Our approach to this involve helping our customers to resolve their problems by offering a “Kubota Farm Solution” package, which includes a tractor, implements, applications, and service contracts. This important thing here is to understand what customers need and deliver what they want. They wish to know how much benefit they can expect from smart farming. In other words, our customers are interested in the outcomes of technology, rather than the technology itself. ‘Value for Money’ is our slogan for that initiative. We hope to satisfy customers needs by bringing up to the ‘Priority Ones’ principle.”

A liaison between Kubota and KVG, François Julienne is taking the lead in promoting smart farming. He is a former KVG employee who became involved early on in the smart farming business of tractors and implements.

“Precision farming and smart farming not only reduce the costs of farm operations, but also benefit farmers, since they no longer have to depend on their own experience and intuition,” he said. “As such, I believe that the introduction of smart farming will be accelerated. For Kubota to be chosen by customers as each player competes in terms of product development, we must definitely enhance our operation and conduct for operators who are on the frontlines of smart farming, and improve the level of service automation. What we want to achieve are total solutions that customers find reasonable and easy to use. We will pursue simple yet unique solutions going forward.”
“Kubota Smart Farming in Germany AGRITECHNICA – The World’s Largest Agricultural Machinery Trade Fair

Strategies for penetrating European upland farming market Marketing that “visualizes” benefits

At AGRITECHNICA, the world’s largest agricultural machinery trade fair in Hanover, Germany in November 2017, Kubota and KVG exhibited their “tractors + implements” solution with smart farming features including many new developments. Exhibiting not only at AGRITECHNICA, but also at other international trade shows, is one of Kubota’s key marketing practices.

“AGRITECHNICA, we used simulations to show visitors the benefits that can be generated through smart farming, such as higher efficiency and lower costs. What we did was to summarize the highest efficiency and lower cost effects, but we also presented what smart farming can do for them before their very eyes using simulations.” (Andreas Kaczmarczyk, EU Agricultural Business Unit)

Such simulations are run not only at trade shows, but also on the farmlands of customers, who can then gain first-hand training for smart farming.

“It is important that farmers really see how they can improve their current situations by introducing smart farming. This means that we need to illustrate how smart farming can give each farmer what he or she wants, such as comfortable and trouble-free operation of his or her tractor, as well as higher efficiency and lower costs. Then we can develop a value chain using training seminars and other opportunities to support farmers by helping them learn how they can benefit from smart farming.” (Alexander Sassenberg, KVG)

As pointed out earlier by Mr. Watanabe, one of the biggest challenges facing Kubota in promoting smart farming in European upland farming markets is its low brand recognition. No matter how excellent in technology and quality services may be, Kubota cannot hope to diffuse smart farming to customers if they do not even know about it.

Such being the case, the EU Agricultural Business Unit is pursuing its utmost efforts into brand recognition enhancement. Following the establishment of Kubota Holdings Europe BV, an attempt has been made to launch a brand profiling process for Europe as a whole, rather than for each individual country. The idea is to strongly forge ahead with enhancement of brand recognition by sending out messages via multichannel media, including SNSs, websites, and advertisements.

For realizing sustainable agriculture – Smart technology is the focal point

AGRITECHNICA, the world’s leading trade fair for agricultural machinery, showcases state-of-the-art machinery from around the world, including tractors, implements, harvesters, components, and precision farming systems. The theme chosen for this year’s event was “Green Future – Smart Technologies,” with a focus on technology that is useful for achieving sustainable agriculture and trends in product development in our increasingly digitalized network society.

On display was a large collection of farm machinery and implements for implementing solutions for soil fertility and crop growth. The exhibits were efficiently impressed many visitors with the smart farming direction being pursued by the Kubota Group.

“We are looking to diffuse our smart farming throughout the European market by offering Kubota value, which comprises ‘tractors + implements’ along with additional smart functions. Our competitors in Europe and North America are talking about precision farming, but our smart farming goes beyond that. You don’t have to own vast tracts of farmland to appreciate the convenience and efficiency of smart farming. Right now, our smart farming solution is based on the M7001 series of large tractors, but we aim to expand the coverage soon by offering smart solutions in lower horsepower ranges.” (Chi Watanabe, Managing Executive Officer, Kubota)

Agricultural Machinery Trade Fair

Markets that visualize benefits

The World’s Largest

Green Future – Smart Technologies
Purifying Industrial Effluent from Food Processing Plants

Ecology and Submerged Membrane Units

Kubota's submerged membrane bioreactor (MBR) system is gaining ground across the globe since its launch of submerged membrane units in 1991, Kubota has continued to forge ahead, strengthening its technology over a quarter century as it learned from experience working directly with customers. As the business expanded across international boundaries along the way, Kubota established Kubota Membrane Europe Ltd. (KME) in 2001, Kubota Membrane U.S.A. Corporation (KMU) in 2005, and Kubota Environmental Engineering (Shanghai) Co., Ltd. (KEEES) in 2011. This has allowed Kubota to better supply its submerged membrane units for treatment of municipal and industrial sewage, thereby offering solutions to water-related and environmental issues around the world. As of 2017, Kubota has delivered its submerged membrane units to approximately 4,500 sites in Asia and Oceania, approximately 600 sites in Europe and Africa, and approximately 400 sites in the Americas, making it the second largest supplier in the global market.

Kubota's MBR system offers greater advantages as compared to the conventional activated sludge process, which is the most common traditional process used for treating sewage and industrial effluent. MBR purifies domestic and industrial effluent through a combination of "degradative treatment by microorganisms" and "membrane filtration." MBR completely eliminates suspended solids as well as organic substances that are difficult to decompose via conventional processes. In addition, MBR almost completely eradicates Escherichia coli. As such, MBR-treated water does not merely satisfy effluent standards, but also is able to be discharged into rivers and the environment and to be recycled for irrigation and flushing toilet purposes. Other elements of Kubota's MBR system that are highly evaluated include easy maintenance and significant conservation of space.

MBR making inroads into Europe

Meeting the EU's strict water quality standards

Kubota Membrane U.S.A. Corporation (KMU) in 2005, Kubota Environmental Engineering (Shanghai) Co., Ltd. (KEEES) in 2011. This has allowed Kubota to better supply its submerged membrane units for treatment of municipal and industrial sewage, thereby offering solutions to water-related and environmental issues around the world. As of 2017, Kubota has delivered its submerged membrane units to approximately 4,500 sites in Asia and Oceania, approximately 600 sites in Europe and Africa, and approximately 400 sites in the Americas, making it the second largest supplier in the global market.

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Mito Kanai
Area Manager
Kubota Merchants Europe Ltd. (KME)
Joined KME in 2005

Joined the Kubota Group in London as a submerged membrane unit sales engineer

A
fter receiving my master's degree from a graduate school in Japan, I turned my academic advisor at her host institute in the Netherlands into an international sales manager for a major manufacturer in the industrial machinery sector. With an academic advisor at her host institute in the Netherlands, I decided to pursue a career in the international sales and marketing field, and I joined KME in 2005.

Located in London, KME is responsible for sales and after-sales services in the European market.

The company has a long history and a strong tradition, with its origins dating back to the early 19th century. KME has a reputation for high-quality products and excellent customer service.

Established in 2001, KME is Kubota’s vehicle for sales and after-sales services of submerged membrane units. While other manufacturers of submerged membrane units for MBR systems typically focus on technical details, KME also pays attention to the needs of customers worldwide. KME’s approach is to provide a complete solution that meets the specific requirements of each project.

As a submembrane unit sales engineer, my primary responsibility is to build and maintain relationships with customers. I work closely with the sales team to understand the needs of potential customers and to develop effective strategies to meet those needs. I also coordinate with the engineering and manufacturing teams to ensure that the projects are on track and to address any issues that may arise.

I feel a strong sense of responsibility to maintain and grow these relationships. This is a rewarding profession, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with so many talented individuals and to contribute to the success of the company.

Global Work Style 1

Exploring the European Continent with African Market in Mind

Sakura Tomita
Innovation Center and Technology Center
Hokkaido Research Institute
Wageningen University & Research (The Netherlands)
Visiting Researcher
Kubota Corporation in 2013

Applying my knowledge of sensor technology from graduate school to solve agricultural issues

In the spring of 2015, a cross-sectional project on PF in Europe and North America was launched, and I was among those who joined the team. Then, in the autumn of that year, I was sent on a mission for two years to Wageningen University & Research, with which I am now affiliated, with the main purpose of extending my research in PF in Europe.

Meanwhile, I am expected to follow up on the European PF market project and to investigate trends in the PF market in Europe. I also attend various conferences and actively working in a variety of different fields. I have attended large-scale ICT trade fairs to discuss knowledge and information on ICT, visited various machinery factories in Europe to contact with the machinery manufacturers, and attended conferences of French farmers.

As a result, I have come to realize how important it is to visit actual farming sites. I feel the difference between the Netherlands and Japan most keenly at conventions and meetings because, in the Netherlands, one will pay any attention to you unless you speak out. Because of this, I have become more proactive in speaking my thoughts and opinions than when I was in Japan. When I return to Japan, I hope to offer assistance as an engineer to a person who is well versed in both mechanics and ICT, so that I can promote collaboration between these two areas.

Business Topics

From Europe to Innovation Center and Technology Center in Japan

Machinery Business European Regional Headquarters
Kubota Holdings Europe B.V. Established

Kubota established Kubota Holdings Europe B.V. in the Netherlands as a regional headquarters for its European machinery business.

Since the 1974 establishment of Kubota Europe S.A.S in France, Kubota has set up subsidiaries and sales companies for manufacturing machinery, construction machinery, and engines in each country to expand its machinery business in Europe. With the establishment of a Regional Headquarters in the Netherlands, Kubota has strengthened its business management field from a country basis to a Pan-European business basis, with the aim of optimizing its business management in Europe. Going forward, Kubota will use the new European Regional Headquarters of the machinery business as a “Global Major Brand” ("GMB") and a “Customer First” and “Priority Onsite” principle.
Smart farming as pursued by Kubota is most certainly an innovative initiative that has potential to prompt a major shift in the way that farming is done. However, not every initiative in Japan, with the KSAS serving as a representative example, can be successfully transplanted just as it is into Europe’s upland farming market. Land for rice farming and land for upland farming are decidedly different in almost every aspect. Moreover, while further enhancement of ICT, including the IoT and AI, is required, this does not guarantee that Kubota’s smart farming will be able to expand into the European upland farming market. Kubota is keenly aware of the importance, both in Japan and overseas, of being “onsite,” where customers actually manage their land. The practice of this “Priority Onsite” principle does not change in the promotion of smart farming. What do customers want and expect, and how can smart farming meet their demands? The future of farming will come into view after this customer-oriented product development approach has been taken. In the world of the future, many types of data gathered by drones from above could be reported to tractors via cloud service, with fully automatic tractors crisscrossing the farmland. There is no doubt whatsoever that future agriculture will be more efficient and less labor-intensive, but what Kubota really wants to accomplish with smart farming is to help dramatically increase the production of food and resolve the food-related problems that the world may face as the global population continues to expand.