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## Reclaiming Profitability: Farming Smarter in

Albert Lea, MN

ProfitPro<sup>®</sup>AG

### Speaker Profile: Dr. Jim Ladlie

#### Meet Jim Ladlie, Founder of ProfitProAG: Inspired by Faith, Moved by Nature, Grounded in Science

When you're trying to make your farm more sustainable and profitable, finding the right partners is critical, especially if you're looking for answers beyond the industrial Ag system. Dr. Jim Ladlie, founder and CEO of ProfitProAG, understands where you're coming from.

"I know farmers have some big questions on their mind by the time they connect with us," said Jim, a Minnesota native and lifelong agriculturist speaking at the 2025 ProfitProAG Winter Conference in Albert Lea Feb. 19-20.

Maybe you can relate to these:

- The advice I'm getting from the co-op, agronomists, university specialists, and others isn't cutting it. Are there any practical alternatives to the industrial nature of modern Ag?
- I'm concerned about where the future of farming is going. Where do I fit in?
- Do you understand where I'm coming from?
- Can you help me solve my challenges?
- Can you help my farm be more sustainable and profitable?
- Are you knowledgeable?
- Will you stay with me after the sale, follow up, and track results?
- Can I trust you?

Jim and his team take a holistic approach to providing these answers. "ProfitProAG is inspired by faith, moved by nature and grounded in science," says Jim, who founded the company in his hometown of Albert Lea, Minnesota, in 2000. "If you want to be more sustainable, profitable, and enjoy farming more, we want to grow with you."

#### Growing from humble beginnings

Jim has been rooted in agriculture his whole life. This love of the land started when Jim and his eight siblings grew up on a 160-acre farm about 4 miles east of Albert Lea. The Ladlie family raised crops, pigs, dairy cattle, chickens, fruits, and vegetables on their diversified farm near Albert Lea Lake.

"All the food we ate was grown on the farm, and we never went hungry," said Jim, who attended country school and walked to the schoolhouse a mile and a half from his family's farm. "It wasn't until 1st grade when I had my first Oreo cookie."

As he grew older, Jim enjoyed his years in 4-H and FFA. "Those activities opened up a whole new world for me," said Jim, who recalls the days of close-knit, rural neighborhoods where everyone helped each other. "When I attended the state FFA convention, it showed me a wealth of opportunities."

This inspired Jim to attend the University of Minnesota, where he competed nationally with the crops judging team and earned his bachelor's degree in agronomy in 1970. While still a college student, he worked



the summer months at Elanco handling customer complaints regarding their newly introduced soybean herbicide called Treflan for three years. This was the first incorporated herbicide released into the market and it often resulted in grower performance complaints. What he learned from this experience was that before he could apply his technical knowledge to address the grower's concern, the customer's behavioral style had to be addressed to develop an open dialog.

From this experience, Jim wrote the book "Are Complaints Really Opportunities?" available on Amazon, addressing the four styles of behavior that you encounter in doing business. This experience provided the knowledge, understanding, and platform to propel his career forward.

### **Switching from industrial Ag to sustainable farming**

After Jim received his Ph.D., he took a job with Eli Lilly/Elanco, where his responsibilities included product research and development in Iowa and Nebraska. He moved to Omaha and set up a new research farm west of Omaha on the Platte River. There he conducted research and development on new agrochemicals. He also hosted numerous customer educational tours for dealers and growers. A new five-day-long sales rep educational event was established. It included hands-on pest identification, agrochemicals knowledge, and customer interaction in sales and complaint handling. "I enjoyed teaching people how to manage crop production challenges, like diagnosing diseases and weed problems by looking at symptoms and patterns," Jim said.

By 1979, Jim was ready to move on from corporate America. He and his wife, Fran, also wanted to move back to Minnesota to be closer to family. He started his first business in the Albert Lea area with 5 acres of land, a few sheds, and a small office. His jobs included small-plot work, writing technical manuals, and doing various jobs for major Ag chemical companies and groups like the United Soybean Board. "Some of this work was a precursor to the certified crop advisor (CCA) program," Jim said.

Big changes in Ag were occurring by the mid-1990s, however, that propelled Jim's business in a new direction. The introduction of glyphosate seemed like a silver bullet for weed control, although overuse of the chemistry ushered in an era of serious herbicide resistance challenges. In this new era of agriculture, major Ag companies were also starting

to consolidate rapidly. "Industrial Ag was starting to look like a dead-end road," Jim said.

Other aspects of the work were troubling, though. "The more I started learning about industrial Ag and corporate America, the more I felt like I was being brainwashed," Jim said. "The problem with industrial Ag is that it thinks it's in control, not the natural systems."

As he reflected on things he'd learned from growing up on his family's farm and 15 years of work experience, Jim envisioned a different approach to farming. He developed relationships with growers like Ray Rawson from Michigan (known for triple-digit soybean yields) and Francis Childs from Iowa (whose corn yields exceeded 400 bushels per acre) to learn their methods for shattering yield records. Jim envisioned a holistic approach driven more by soil health and nature's principles, not endless chemical applications.

By 1995, he started transitioning his company from the industrial Ag model to a more regenerative and sustainable system. "I wanted to help show farmers there's a viable, sustainable, profitable alternative to the industrial Ag model," Jim said.

### **Coming full circle for greater farm profitability, sustainability**

In 2000, Jim created ProfitProAG. The company is based on the regenerative Full Circle System, which helps crop and livestock farmers get more from every acre, every animal, and every gallon of manure.

"The heart of the Full-Circle System revolves around healthy soil—the kind filled with earthworm holes, nutrient-rich worm castings, and aggregated soil particles with a texture like coffee grounds," Jim says. "It's all about the microbiome, energy, and nutrition."

The microbiome consists of microbes that are both helpful and potentially harmful. "When a microbiome is in balance, it's filled with a diverse population of beneficial microbes that help you build healthier soils that help produce healthier crops that nourish healthier livestock that produce healthier food," Jim said.

The Full Circle System acknowledges there is divine design and divine order in the world. "The natural system is embedded in the Full Circle System," Jim said, who believes it's important to be grounded spiritually. "If you ask what guides ProfitProAG, we're inspired by faith, moved by nature, and grounded in

science."

While Jim was committed to building ProfitProAG around this holistic philosophy, it wasn't always easy. "For the first five to eight years when I started focusing on a more sustainable approach to farming, I felt alone. I wondered, 'Am I the only one who sees things the way I do?'"

It turns out the answer was no. Jim grew the ProfitProAG team with skilled, knowledgeable agronomists and livestock specialists who serve a wide range of farming operations. "We work with conventional and organic growers," Jim said. "We serve crop farmers and livestock producers, including swine, beef, dairy, and poultry producers. We work with farms of all sizes across the country."

To make the Full-Circle System even more useful for growers, Jim created the "Farming the Controllables - Recipe for Success". The "Recipe for Success", which is tailored to each grower's specific needs, is based on practical farmer wisdom.

"I think of advice like 'See what you look at,' which I heard from Dr. Carey Reams, an Ag researcher who studied the principles of producing nutrient-dense, high-energy crops," Jim said.

Reams emphasized the correlation between Brix levels (a measure of sugars, amino acids, and other soluble solids in a solution) in plants and nutrient density. Measuring Brix levels is part of ProfitProAG's 3-phase "Recipe for Success", which includes:

- **Phase I Residue Management.** This "second harvest" focused on efficient breakdown of crop residue to improve soil health and boost nutrient retention/availability, nitrogen fixation, water infiltration, and carbon release to feed the crop during the growing season, while reducing residual insect and disease pressure. The key benefit is improved nutrient cycling from the crop residue, which can help lower your fertilizer bill. The microbiome applied on the residue after also produces a warmer soil environment at planting, resulting in more uniform emergence and crop stand. These factors alone can provide a 15 to 35 bushel per acre increase in corn yields.

- **Phase II At-Plant.** Jumpstart your yield, and get your crop off to a strong start with early-season plant health and vigor. Biological seed coatings and the right low-salt starter package offer supply key nutrients to seedlings and enhances plant health all season long. Establishing healthy plants below and above ground is critical to maximizing the crop's genetic yield potential.

- **Phase III In-Season.** This "stay green" phase is designed to mitigate plant stress, which is critical when the reproductive phase of yield development begins. Foliar application of nutrients, energy, and stress-reducing technology builds resilience and uniformity in a crop-production system. The result is increased seed numbers, weight, and nutrient density in grains. Forages show improved nutrient content, energy, taste, storability, and reduced mycotoxins.

"Our Recipe for Success system of biology-based crop production helps you build healthier soils that help produce healthier crops that nourish healthier livestock that produce healthier food," Jim said.

If you'd like to lower your input costs, raise your profit potential, produce nutrient-dense food, contribute to a healthier environment, create a business that's sustainable for the long run, and enjoy farming again, get connected with ProfitProAG.

"There's no greater satisfaction than to see the light bulb go on for a grower," Jim said. "Every day can be a positive learning experience. Change is coming in agriculture. If we do it right, the opportunities are unbelievable going forward."