A year ago Ron Lloyd was right where many ag grads would like to be: in high-level management with an international corporation. But he walked away from this secure position to return to his roots on the farm and take a job with no title for an agricultural start-up with no name.

“I couldn’t resist the opportunity to support the vision of Gregg Sauder to find and develop new farming methods and technologies to capture more yield, and ultimately higher returns, for farmers,” Lloyd says.

In April of 2014 Lloyd joined what is now known as 360 Yield Center as the agronomy and field research lead. The company is growing at “E-speed” (entrepreneur speed), with more than 60 employees in its first year, including many Illini in key positions.

“360 Yield Center helps farmers take control in ways they haven’t always been able to,” Lloyd says. “We’re developing systems and products around three activities: sense, decide, apply. We help farmers sense what is happening with their crop and soil, use that information to make a decision, and apply that decision to increase their bottom line.

“My job is to spearhead research and development and manage a highly talented and experienced agronomy team,” he continues. “It’s an opportunity to provide game-changing technologies and products that make a difference for farmers.”

Lloyd says this is not a job he could have done right out of college 20 years ago. “My personal and professional experiences have equipped me to be ready at this point in time to help make major changes in ag production. The people in production agriculture have a passion to produce a plentiful crop and provide a safe food supply. To work beside them and continue to fine-tune our production systems is what drives me every morning.”

He graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in agronomy in 1994. Lloyd began his career with United Agri Products, but in 1996 left that job to begin an 18-year career with Monsanto. It was, he says, a “very exciting time” in agriculture.

“That was right before Roundup Ready soybeans were launched,” he says. “The first biotech product was about to hit the market, and I went to work for the company that was launching it.”

Lloyd’s first position with Monsanto was as a local sales representative, and after several years he began taking graduate classes two evenings a week. Soon he had the opportunity to become a technical representative—a position he had coveted since day one. “My responsibilities were split, about half conducting field research and the rest providing technical support for six western Illinois sales reps. I loved it.”

Seven years later, Lloyd began managing 12 sales reps across eight states. That opened the door for other management and leadership opportunities, including director of the National Accounts Group in the animal ag division,
Join the effort to transform Turner Hall and help prepare students to go on to solve some of the world's greatest challenges. Financial support and in-kind donations of equipment are still needed to complete phases one and two of this project. For more information on how you can get involved, contact Marise Robbins-Forbes at mrforbes@illinois.edu.


Despite his success and satisfaction with Monsanto, Lloyd left in April last year. "It was the toughest professional decision I had made. I thought I would retire there. I always made my own choices at Monsanto, and as I moved on to different levels of responsibility and leadership, I was spending more time away from home. I was getting removed from the farm and not seeing my family as much as I wanted and needed to."

Lloyd says it’s been invigorating to get back to his agronomy roots. “The change has given me the opportunity to be home almost every night and to reengage in the family farming operation. I’m an only child and an only grandchild. Right now, four generations of our family live on the farm—my grandparents, my parents, my wife, Michelle, myself, and my two boys.”

Multiple generations tie Lloyd’s family to the University of Illinois. Both a great-grandmother and great-grandfather have Illinois degrees, along with his father, grandfather, two great-uncles, and a great-aunt.

In addition to serving on the ACES alumni board, Lloyd has held alumni leadership roles in his ag fraternity, IlliDell of Alpha Gamma Sigma. His alumni connections aren’t all business, however. For 20 years, he and a dozen of his IlliDell friends have been taking annual ski trips to locations as far away as Austria.

Lloyd’s passion and commitment to ACES also led him to join the Turner Hall Transformation Committee.

"Not only is Ron one of our superstar ACES alums, but he’s nationally respected for his agronomic expertise. We have been fortunate to work with him on the Turner Hall campaign,” says Marise Robbins-Forbes, director of development for the Department of Crop Sciences.

Lloyd says he jumped at the opportunity to serve on the team. “I’m happy they’re giving Turner Hall the attention it deserves. Agriculture is an essential and viable profession. If we want to recruit the best and the brightest to the University of Illinois, we need the newest and best equipment and facilities to prepare them to go out and make a difference.

“It’s not a small task to feed the world,” he continues. “While that may sound grandiose, it’s literally what we are charged with in agriculture. It’s been very rewarding to use the relationships, networks, and knowledge I’ve established over the past 20 years, engaging others to help accomplish the important task of updating Turner Hall for current and future generations.”

Lloyd is speaking about the Turner Hall renovation, but you know the sentiments run much deeper when he says, “I think we need to climb to the tallest peak and shout about what we’re doing, because we’re proud of it. We’re excited about it. It’s a great time for the university and the college, and it’s a great time for agriculture.”

Noteworthy headlines during Lloyd’s years at Illinois

[Image of timeline with notable events marked.]