



David Austin
Field Research &
Information Management Director
Pioneer Hi-Bred International
B.S. – Agronomy, 1992; UW-Madison
M.S. – Agronomy, 1995; Iowa State University
Ph.D. – Agronomy, 1997; Iowa State University

“ I can still remember the excitement of my first DNA extraction while working in the Agronomy Molecular Genetics lab. This was just one of many valuable hands-on experiences during my undergraduate years at UW that motivated me to continue my studies in plant breeding and genetics.”
- David Austin

He spends his time delivering software solutions

Dave Austin uses his science background every day, and when it comes to his career, he is exactly where he wants to be—on the cutting edge of scientific research. His bachelor’s degree in agronomy from UW-Madison helped prepared him for graduate studies in agronomy and for his current job. Dave is a field research information management director for Pioneer Hi-Bred International, a science-based company headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, that provides a full line of crop seeds and additives for forage and grain.

“When I started school at UW-Madison, I knew I wanted to get involved in the biotechnology industry and I thought majoring in biochemistry was the way to get there,” he says. Then while taking Agronomy 100, Dave was approached by the professor, Dr. Bill Tracy, who told him about all of the many possibilities in biotechnology for an agronomy major. Since he had a background in crop science, it was an easy decision to switch from biochemistry to agronomy.

Dave secured a lab assistant position soon after he entered the agronomy department. The experience sparked his interest in research and led him to pursue more lab positions and independent research projects. These opportunities prepared him to pursue a graduate degree.

When Dave started looking for full-time employment, he applied at Pioneer Hi-Bred International for a research position. Although he didn’t get the job he originally applied for, another division of the company saw his resume, contacted him, and encouraged him to apply for a different position. They hired him and he has been working for the Information Management division ever since.

Over time, Dave worked his way up to being director of the division. In his current position, he combines his science background with his computer skills. His department functions as a liaison between the company researchers and the information technology staff that writes the software programs. The programs are then used by the researchers to facilitate product development efforts.

As director, Dave spends about 80 percent of his time working with people in an administrative role. He helps align the department’s resources to make sure they’re working on the right research projects with the right technology and infrastructure to meet the research goals.

Dave is most thankful for his solid scientific grounding. His education in agronomy enables him to understand the complex research projects so he can communicate the programming demands to the technology department.

“There is a high demand for science grads,” says Dave. “You need to create a network through your undergraduate years to connect to those opportunities.”