IFS Service Management solution enables Kubota to offer targeted predictive service maintenance packages

Service management from IFS has allowed agricultural machinery manufacturer Kubota Corporation to track the lifecycle of assets in the field, increasing maintenance and inspection efficiency and enabling innovative predictive service packages through the analysis of historic data.

Kubota operates four primary business segments: agriculture solutions; water and environmental solutions; engines; and construction machinery. Its domestic agricultural machinery sales division has made the IFS Field Service Management solution available to its 18 sales affiliates and partners in Japan, which sell Kubota tractors, rice transplanters, combine harvesters, and other types of farm machinery.

Using IFS, in 2021 the Division achieved a 7% year-on-year increase in service revenues at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. By using the solution to visualize farming machine maintenance histories, the company has developed innovative maintenance packages for farmers identified to have high machine-failure risks.

Full life-cycle management

One of Kubota's objectives for its agricultural machinery maintenance business in Japan is to sustain growth by expanding the national service network. Hideo Sueda, General Manager of Kubota's Agricultural Machinery Service Department, knew the organization's 30-year-old service management system needed upgrading.

"The old system was designed to manage the field service of farm machines currently owned and used by each customer," explains Sueda. "As most farmers replace machines every few years, it is not uncommon to buy and use pre-owned or refurbished units. As our old system was not designed to track maintenance records of each unit across changes in ownership, maintenance data could be lost."

About Kubota Corporation

Established in 1890 as a manufacturer of metal casting products, Kubota has since broadened its product lines to include cast-iron water pipes, industrial engines, and construction machinery. With global manufacturing and development facilities, the company retails in more than 120 countries, making 68% of its annual sales outside Japan.

Kubota began to overhaul the system to centrally track and manage the entire life cycle of every unit by serial number. “We wanted to track field maintenance histories, operational status, and failure trends down to the unit level across changes in ownership. That way we could use the data to offer the current owner of the unit the right maintenance package and replacement parts,” explains Sueda.

Horizon planning

Another challenge was to level out peaks in workload for field service teams throughout the year. Japanese rice farmers are especially busy attending their paddies in spring and fall. During these peak seasons, farmers contact Kubota frequently with service inquiries and requests, at times exceeding the service capacity available. In some cases, service teams applied temporary fixes to faulty machines or declined service requests, resulting in loss of business. The service department needed a way to strategically manage long-term horizon planning, so chose to switch from conventional corrective maintenance to a preventive approach. “This meant we could identify and repair a small problem with a machine before the peak season, and reduce the risk of a serious problem,” says Sueda.

After extensive evaluations, Kubota chose the dedicated field management solution from IFS, selecting modules for field service management, service parts management, mobile app, and staff schedule management.

Says Sueda, “We chose IFS Service Management because it offers an intuitive dispatch console that visualizes field service processes, a mobile app for field service technicians, and it can identify customers who have high machine-failure risks. We also liked the fact it is dedicated to field service and maintenance management, with screens that looks familiar to our service technicians."

The migration project was launched in 2016, initially starting with two sales affiliates to help define service requirements, migrate data and test the system. “We cleansed the massive amount of data stored in the old system for 30 years and updated the master by loading additional codes,” says Sueda. By August 2020, Kubota had successfully deployed IFS Service Management across 11 other sales affiliates and 5 partners– a total of 18 locations.

Maintenance planning and progress tracking

Service teams of the 18 entities track the maintenance status of customers’ farm machines on the IFS dispatch console in IFS and create monthly maintenance plans and track progress on their PCs and smartphones. IFS also enables one of the sales affiliates to coordinate service projects and staffing requirements across several service centers to better meet customers’ needs. Service technicians of another sales affiliate use the IFS Mobile app to order service parts and bill and collect payments while on site, reducing the time they spend on paperwork in the office.

Benefits seen using IFS

- The visualization of maintenance status has improved work efficiency
- Mobile app has given field service technicians greater flexibility in choosing where to work from
- The deal closure rate increased 45%
- Annual revenues from field services of agricultural machinery increased 7% year-on-year in Japan

The use of a list of recommended customers has greatly improved sales efficiency. One of the sales affiliates has achieved a 45% jump in the deal closure rate by calling on customers identified to have high machine-failure risks based on maintenance histories of their machines.

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>
> **Hideo Sueda, General Manager of the Agricultural Machinery Service Department, Kubota Corporation**

Future strategic insights

The first two sales affiliates to use IFS have already accumulated three years' worth of field service data, with trend analysis offering the potential for valuable insights. "The next step is to use the massive data accumulated by our peripheral systems and the cloud-based Kubota Smart Agri System (KSAS) as a basis for establishing AI-enabled, more sophisticated preventive and predictive maintenance practices. We will also upgrade the dispatch console that comes with IFS from a data viewer to a solution for streamlining business processes and reducing the time required for field services," says Sueda.

Kubota intends to encourage its 18 sales affiliates and partners to make greater use of IFS. Kubota is also shifting its strategic focus from product sales to service sales. The company is undergoing a transformation to establish a new business model that will deliver value to customers through a broader range of services, such as offering professional agriculture business consulting.

Find out more

Further information, e-mail info@ifs.com, contact your local IFS office or visit our web site, ifs.com

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