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Peoples Company Land Agent and REALTOR Scott Kelly shares the Q&A responses of Brent Willett, Executive Director of the [Cultivation Corridor](#), in Ames, Iowa. Have an idea to share with us for a guest blog post or Agribusiness Monthly interview? [Email Scott today.](#)

Tell us about your background and what brought you to the Cultivation Corridor. My background is in economic development. I started my career at the [Iowa Department of Economic Development](#) [now Iowa Economic Development Authority] and then moved on to run chamber and economic development organizations in the Fairfield and Mason City/Clear Lake regions prior to coming to the Cultivation Corridor last year.

Tell us more about the goals of the Cultivation Corridor and what your role is as Executive Director. The Cultivation Corridor is a regional economic development initiative designed to leverage Central Iowa's dominant position as a global leader in ag/bioscience investment, talent attraction and research into new economic and human opportunities in the region. By leveraging an extensive network of private business; economic development, community and workforce development organizations; local government and Iowa State University, the Corridor is uniquely positioned to serve as a distinctive resource to companies in the region in helping to lead the expansion of the ag / bioscience sector in Central Iowa. The Corridor's fundamental goal is to firmly establish Central Iowa, which we define as an eleven-county region surrounding Des Moines and Ames, as the world's most attractive and dynamic region for agbioscience investment, talent and research. My role as Executive Director is to provide executive leadership, management and fiscal oversight / fundraising for the organization. I work closely with our 24-member board of directors comprised of executives from the public and private sector agriculture, bioscience and economic development community to develop short-, mid- and long-range strategy and priority implementation for the effort.

Give us your thoughts on the current agribusiness industry as it relates to the overall economy. The current commodity price headwinds ag producers are facing will continue to have short-term downstream effects on segment of the ag, ag technology and agbioscience economy in Central Iowa. Equipment manufacturers are expecting softer 2015 markets as producers pull back on capital projects. Public and private R&D expenditures continue to gain steam in the ag and bio sectors, however, just one of several factors that suggest the agbio economy in Central Iowa is structurally robust and positioned for significant sustained growth. Central Iowa's agbioscience economy will continue to out-point many of its global peers thanks to its level of diversification and research and development alignments with [Iowa State University](#).

Tell us what you see coming down the pipeline for the Cultivation Corridor. In addition to an aggressive branding and marketing campaign in 2015, we have been busy with a handful of prospective economic development projects from domestic and international clients. We also are working closely with administrators and researchers at ISU to track a number of R&D and collaborative opportunities materializing at the federal level.

What advice do you have for communities or specific commercial/industrial parks within the "Corridor" area that are trying to attract businesses to their parks? First, certify your sites. IEDA has an excellent program which writes down much of the costs associated with site certification. We encourage communities also to strongly consider the industry cluster targets they may have for their industrial parks – if agribusiness, agbioscience, agtechnology, et cetera, is seen as a realistic objective, and we can help talk through those issues – we encourage that tangible attention – in lieu of simply lip service – be given to building out a site and building environment which is responsive to the needs of that industry, be that from an infrastructure, talent pool or even community or park branding perspective. Finally, we are intimately interested at the Corridor about what the regional site and building supply conducive to agbio is – please communicate with us periodically to let us know how activity has been and what you're doing. We highly encourage all of our community partners to include some level of Cultivation Corridor branding on their websites- typically this is through including a Corridor logo somewhere on the homepage which links back

to our site and all of our regional marketing collateral.

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