

Harvesting Information

Increased Data Needs Require New Tools

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Todd Sears, president of IntelliAir, tells attendees of the DTN/Progressive Farmer 2010 Ag Summit how his firm's equipment can help maintain grain quality in bins. (DTN/Progress Farmer photo by Jim Patrico)

CHICAGO (DTN) -- Farming has become as much about harvesting information as harvesting grain. In any given season, information flows into farm offices or onto smart phones in ever-greater torrents.

A problem? Sometimes.

But it is also information that gives today's farmers an edge in the markets, better control over maintenance costs and minute-to-minute updates on planting, spraying or harvesting operations.

Todd Sears, president of IntelliAir, has found value for growers in the data that can be mined from the grain bin. IntelliAir's BinManager grain management system allows growers to build a virtual picture of what is going on inside their grain bins

Sears described his company's Internet-based bin management system to growers attending the DTN/The Progressive Farmer 2010 Ag Summit in Chicago. BinManager keeps track of temperature and moisture levels inside the grain bin at intervals of four feet. If a hot spot or other problem develops, the owner of the bin will get an email or cell phone alert. It is an early warning that gives him time to respond to a problem before it gets worse.

"My investment lies in my bins," Sears said. "A lot of times we think we have it all wrapped up and then we lose it in those bins."

BinManager includes features that give farmers remote control of fans and heaters. The system turns them on and off at times most advantageous to the quality of grain and to the management of energy costs. The system also alerts growers to malfunctions in these systems.

"If my fans don't turn on, I get a call," Sears said.

Information is also worth many thousands of dollars when it is gathered from equipment operating out in the field. In the modern corn or soybean field, it is a place where capacity is being complimented by smart technology, says Jerry Roell, director of coordinated farm and worksite in John Deere's Intelligent Solutions Group.

With the demands made on high capacity machinery, the very systems that drive productivity, wireless technologies can help growers realize the full benefit of their machinery investments.

Managers working far-flung operations don't often have time to manage their farms from the seat of the tractor or combine, Roell said, at the Ag Summit. But with telematics (some also call it telemetry), which allows for the movement of data from the machinery operating in the field to a central collection location, farm managers can monitor entire farming operations (i.e. planting, spraying or harvesting) as well as put resources together in the places that maximize time and efficiency.

This is the purpose built into Deere's JDLink system. It is designed to put information gathered in real time into a form that also allows managers to act remotely in real time, or to act now to stave off a problem that may occur in the future.

John Deere recently introduced two new levels to its JDLink system -- Ultimate and Select. JD Link Select provides, among other things, roadmaps and driving directions based on GPS location, curfew alerts, maintenance management and machine utilization profiles.

It also has a feature that gives a Deere dealer remote access to a vehicle's diagnostic data. This would allow the dealer to pinpoint a problem area and put appropriate parts onboard a service truck before it heads to the field. Could be a real time saver during critical planting or harvest periods.

JDLink Ultimate includes the Select features plus several others including advanced machine utilization reports.

Deere's system also offers optional satellite communication for data transfer in areas where cell signals are sparse.

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