

[The Western Producer](#)

Agriculture: there's an app for that

Getting started Weather, markets, cheap gas locations at farmers' fingertips

Posted Jan. 5th, 2012 by Dan Yates



More farmers are using smart phones and analysts predict agricultural apps will become more available. | File photo

Peter Gredig is a 21st century farmer.

Armed with a smartphone and a tablet computer, he monitors futures prices, elevator bids, weather forecasts, commodity news and information from agronomists, all while in the field.

"If farmers can avoid sitting at a desktop, they will," said the southern Ontario corn, soy and wheat producer.

Gredig is on the cutting edge of mobile technology, both as a user and as a partner in AgNition, which consults with companies and develops applications.

He said more farmers are picking up smartphones, but getting started can be intimidating because of the thousands of applications available on Blackberry, iPhone and Android phones.

He suggests beginning with the basics, using the device for e-mail and to access market and weather information. From there, users can get started with consumer-assistance applications. Need to find the cheapest gas? There's an app for that.

"It's empowering for producers," said Gredig. "I don't know that there's a sector that's going to benefit more from mobile technology than agriculture."

The list of agriculture-related apps isn't overwhelming, but it's growing.

Some keep users up to date with news and commodities, such as Alltech's app for pork producers. Others help farmers in the field, acting as a reference for diseases or pests, while others assist producers with decision-making.

For example, the AGRiplot application allows users to calculate areas plotted on a map, which are handy for measuring acreage, while DuPont's tank mix calculator helps determine the amount of product needed to treat a specific field area. Pioneer Hi-Bred's From the Field app keeps users current on the latest information from agronomists.

“It changes the way you manage the business of your farm,” said Gredig. “I’ve yet to find a producer that if they legitimately give it a shot would ever walk away from it.”

He expects more decision-making applications in the future.

University of Guelph associate professor Rebecca Hallett said agriculture is ready for the technology.

“I think it’s definitely something that people are beginning to embrace and I think there’s probably a critical mass of producers with smartphones now that it makes sense to try to distribute information in that way rather than in some of the more traditional ways,” she said.

Hallett worked with Gredig and a U of G research team to develop a Blackberry application that tells producers when to spray for soybean aphids.

Gredig sees potential for developers to make better use of the smartphone’s GPS function to create apps that allow farmers to keep better records and share information.

“All of those things are going to start to come together in apps that make it much easier for producers to make those critical decisions on the fly.”

AgNition’s next project is ScoutDoc, an application for the iPad that allows users making field walks to chart crop and field identification details on a map as the season progresses.

Gredig said producers’ only concern is the cost of the device, but he argued that it is small compared to the cost of machinery.

As well, he said the greatest benefit may be the simplest one.

“If you want to measure payback on these devices, efficiency with your time is probably the biggest one.”

Gredig writes about mobile farming technology and reviews apps at themobilefarmer.com.