

Three farmers advise on the future of data; "About 15 years ago we (farmers) dropped the ball in not monetizing our data." By Ian Cumming

Corn_Soy_Wheat

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TAP PARKER FARMS 10,000 acres in Louisiana and a significant chunk of his crop is cotton. He uses the newest cotton harvesting technology, a \$750,000 (U.S.) machine that harvests 100 acres per day, and, while running in the field, not only forms the bale of cotton, but tightly wraps it in plastic, ready to be shipped to market. Speaking on a farmer panel on disruptive technology at the Ag Tech Nexus Conference, Parker then showed a picture of an employee, walking around the field, writing his name prominently on the cotton bale plastic with a marker .

His name has to be written on by hand and hopefully won't smudge off during transport, because a certain machinery company won't release the use of its ID chips to that cotton machine manufacturer, said Parker. A standard scanner used by everyone in the world could and would identify it as being his cotton from his field, he said. For agriculture technology such as this to have a positive impact for farmers, "it has to overcome the Green/Red tradition," said Parker.

He observed that "hockey pucks" can now be slapped on any machine, from any company, to provide cropping details and data back to the private equity firm in Atlanta, whose farms he also manages. "It's important for all of our systems to jive," said Lynn Rohrschelb, who cash crops 7,000 acres on her family farm in Illinois. With employees and family members ranging from 26 to 77 years of age, and having a variety of equipment and tractors from various machinery companies, any technology also has to be simple and userfriendly, she said.

Field View has allowed them to accomplish coordinating all of the machinery data, said Rohrschelb. "It's been a huge gamechanger for our operation in real time," she said. This Field View technology, "enables us to track everything from the 47 farms we manage," said Jacob Wade, who owns 6,000 acres, but also manages these additional farms for investors.

Whether tracking applications of fertilizer and spray through a phone or iPad, "you can monitor anything, even down to a wheelbarrow," said Wade. "About 15 years ago we (farmers) dropped the ball in not monetizing our data," said Parker. "It has a lot of value." "My father, in his 60s, is paranoid about sharing data," said Rohrschelb. "But with certain companies wanting our information, it will only help us all in the long run," she said.

"I'm okay with sharing my data," said Wade, noting that he understood those having the opposite view, "like my mother who isn't on the Internet, because she's worried about it." He used the example of ongoing field trials he is running of 14 different hybrids, replicated four times, with the data being publicly shared. "Fifteen years from now, sharing data will be okay," predicted Wade. However, with profound differences in individual operations needing to be accounted for when analyzing data, whether it be, for example, soil types or fertility levels, "if everything is recorded correctly, it's valuable. If not, it isn't," he said.

When running her farming operation, "I want an array of programs and products," said Rohrschelb. "I don't want one with protected data, otherwise we're going to be stuck in one hole." "The companies that are not aligned with someone, will do the best in the future," said Wade. "The ones that are on their own, using all data, will do the best, it's only going to get better," he predicted.

He advised companies to find their specialty niche and to "not get in an oversaturated market." Both Rohrschelb and Wade see future value in technology such as soil sensors triggering when to irrigate, or the same technology monitoring soil composition and compaction, plus drones being a part of everyday farming.

On Wade's farm he's testing 15 different technologies and products this year, down from the planned 25, due to the terrible weather, he said. No matter the growing conditions, "I have to prove they are better on my own farm," he said. These data monitoring companies also have to align with distributors and manufacturers, to bring true tech value to the agriculture chain, said Parker.

"Check with farmers first, before you (tech companies) put a lot of money into it. Listen to the farmer, because the farmer has not been listened to for a lot of these products." "Some companies hit the target, some just throw things against the wall."