

Mobile app designed to streamline field record-keeping

The tool is intended make things like residue, fertility, disease, and insect management easy

BY LOIS HARRIS
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A new mobile application for Android tablets and iPads is designed to help farmers better manage their crops with useful information on field characteristics like crop residue, soil composition, fertility, disease and insect infestations, and more.

The idea is to provide farmers with an easy-to-use field record keeping and smart soil sampling system that improves their profitability while better protecting the environment.

Dave Branson, CEO of FieldTRAKS Solutions, showed what his new product, FarmHand™, can do in front of about 80 farmers, commodity representatives, government workers and academics gathered at a symposium hosted by Farm & Food Care Ontario in Guelph on March 3rd.

Bruce Kelly, Farm & Food Care's environmental program manager, kicked off the presentation by talking about how crop residue has traditionally been measured by using a rope to mark out a twelve-foot square and getting down on hands and knees to manually count the trash left over after harvest.

"Dave decided that was a lot of work and made an app instead," Kelly said.

To develop the application, Branson received funding from one of two programs Kelly's organization delivered over two years on behalf of the Ontario and federal governments. More than \$2 million was used in 46 projects aimed at practical research into better water conservation and nutrient management in the province's agricultural industry.

The application has many functions and is fairly straightforward. It can be used online or offline, and farmers can record their own observations. "One of the goals was to make it easy to navigate," Branson said.

As a result, the application's front page has a dashboard that provides information on recent activity, upcoming scheduled tasks, news and weather feeds. It has a task manager that flags when product applications should be done and, once the task is completed, can be marked as finished.

The system is pre-populated as much as possible with a data-

base that has more than 2,000 different entries on 60 different field crops, including weeds, insects, diseases, and application products. All the data is tailored to Ontario conditions.

The data are organized at the crop level for planting and product applications and at the field level for manure, fertilizer, soil sampling and tillage. Farmers retrieve data according to the crop year, and comparisons can be made year over year.

Users are able to import and display map layers for each field, including management zones, elevations/topography, yields and satellite images.

At the field level, the manure applications follow the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Publication

811 - the Agronomy Guide for Field Crops - method. It can calculate nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium credits based on either 31 livestock classes or a direct entry of laboratory analysis.

At the crop level, farmers can use the scouting application to record the general description and detailed observations of weeds, insects, diseases, damages, nutrients and moisture. They can also keep GPS location and photo records of the affected plants and crop.

Branson says the application is currently in the testing phase and invites all farmers to try it out for free by applying at www.fieldtraks.ca. He hopes to have it available from Apple and Google this May.



Bruce Kelly, environmental program manager for Farm & Food Care Ontario (right), congratulates Dave Branson, CEO of FieldTRAKS (left) after he presented his new mobile application at a recent symposium in Guelph.



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