

# Cold Weather Gave Area Farmers Chance To Study Precision Farming

MARTIN, TENN.

The temperature hovered around freezing. There was snow on the ground. But inside the West Tennessee Agricultural Pavilion area farmers were already planning for greener, warmer days.

More than 200 farmers attended the Precision Farming Field Day at the University of Tennessee at Martin to learn about the latest technology, methods and equipment to help them make the most of their efforts.

"Agriculture is an ever-changing industry," said John Chester, of Martin, the 2008 Excellence in Agriculture Award from the National Farm Bureau Federation. "If we don't stay on top of the new technology and new equipment, our operations will suffer." Chester said a day in the dead of winter provides the perfect time to "learn new concepts and make sure we're applying the technologies we're currently using correctly." It also provided a break from paperwork and equipment maintenance.

The event was sponsored by Tennessee Tractor LLC and UT Martin, covering topics

such as toolbars and planters, variable rate applications and autosteer systems.

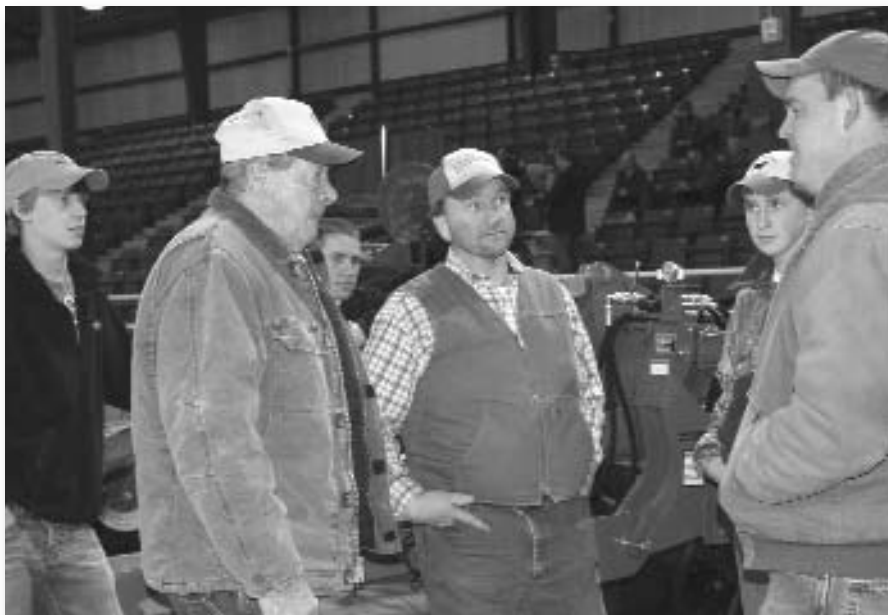
Danny Marbury, chief officer and one of the owners of Tennessee Tractor, headquartered in Alamo, said the first clinic at UT Martin was well attended despite the weather. He added that is was just one of the many clinics or schools the company sponsors to help farmers improve their operations. "We've got a lot of educational classes for the farmers. They touch on everything from software to hardware."

Dr. Joey Mehlhorn, UT Martin professor of agricultural economics, conducted one of the sessions at the field day and noted that efficiency is the key. "If we look over the last 40 years, input prices for farmers have grown each year continually while prices received for farmers struggle to keep pace." He said it becomes important for farmers to be more efficient. "So what precision ag can do is it can allow them to save money and be more efficient and not spread fertilizer, chemical and seed anywhere

they don't need to.

"Precision Farming is being able to manage information in a timely and efficient manner. It is everything from variable rate technology that allows you to put different seed rates out at different levels, it includes managing technology, yield mapping and any kind of technology that allows you to put resources and inputs where you want them, not just a broadcast method."

Kirk and Kyle Dixon of Fulton attended the field day mainly to consider global positioning systems. Kyle has more than 10 years of farm-



Among those attending the Precision Farming Field Day, Feb. 16, at the University of Tennessee at Martin, from left, are Tyler Parker, Bill Woods, Jackson farmers; Tanner Perkins, UT Martin sophomore agriculture business major from Jackson; Charlie Rowlett, UT Martin Agricultural and Natural Resources Teaching Complex director, Ethan Rowlett and John Chester, all of Martin.

ing joining his father, who has 40-plus years. "I'm just trying to learn something new to help in the future – primarily the GPS technology." His father echoed that was their focus and added, "We're already using it some." Field day was a time to "decide how much money to spend (on a GPS) or 'if to spend."

Also attending the Feb. 16 field day was David Sublette, of Fulton. A UT Martin alumnus, he owns Interactive Software Systems, so he understands the computer aspects of farming very well. Noting he is a "part-time" farmer with a small operation, he likes to see the new products. His hope is that the field day will showcase something he's had his eye on – just better and cheaper. He attends a field day every year to see what's available and "can I afford it yet."

Following lunch, there were three ride-and-drive demonstrations in the pavilion parking lot before farmers headed home for more cold-weather tasks before spring. △

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