LSU AgCenter Agents Start Precision Agriculture Blog

BATON ROUGE, LA.

LSU AgCenter agents in north Louisiana have started a blog to help farmers use new technology and equipment to maximum capabilities.

The blog at www.lsuprecisionag.wordpress.com gives producers examples of how practicing precision agriculture can aid in production, said Dennis Burns, LSU AgCenter agent in Tensas Parish.

Farmers are using GPS receivers on their equipment to increase their efficiency. The GPS technology uses latitude and longitude coordinates to direct planting, fertilizing, spraying and harvesting operations.

"You can build a prescription after seeing problems in the field – good parts and bad," Burns said.

R.L. Frazier, LSU AgCenter agent in Madison Parish, said he wants farmers to get the maximum use from inputs by "putting the right products in the right areas." He said it does not always equate to cost savings in the short term.

Frazier believes 60 percent of the harvest equipment in north Louisiana has onboard GPS technology to be able to record yield data on the go at pre-defined intervals. Recordings include weight, elevation, moisture and numerous other measurements at a given point, he explained.

After the information is gathered, data for multiple years can be combined on one map to identify field differences such as elevation areas to improve management decisions, Frazier said. As producers amass data, they can create management zones.

Frazier said he worked with a young producer whose field dropped in production by using data from geographic information system software to help identify the soil structure combined with maps of harvest information to define management zones.

Frazier used the producer's information to develop a variable-rate fertility prescription for the problem field. Then the farmer used a variable-rate applicator to apply fertilizer and lime according to the prescription.

While half of the field had been producing below-average yields, two-thirds improved to above-average after the recommended applications, Frazier said.

Farmers can develop variable-rate spray maps and use GPS receivers to monitor machine location and speed. Then, GPS-based shut-off valves on a sprayer can turn on and off at appropriate times to avoid overlapping and wasting chemicals, Frazier added.

Burns said they chose the blog to distribute the information because the material can go out quickly in that format. Other LSU AgCenter agents will be contributing to the blog, which started in November 2010. Δ