

MAY / JUNE 2011

real-life
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AgriSuccess



Yohan Perreault seizes niche market opportunities in Asian foods



FEATURES

- 10 Wireless technologies open new frontiers for farmers**
Your daily routine likely involves some form of technology. How you make it work is up to you.
- 12 Take the smart approach to mobile**
Smartphones are powerful management tools. Here's what to consider if you're purchasing your first one.
- 15 Explore Twitter and Facebook for business**
Social media platforms can inform you on market decisions and promote your business. The trick is using them effectively.
- 17 There's an app for that**
Apps are small but powerful software programs that have the potential to change the way you manage your farm.

COLUMNS

- 3 The big picture**
Spanning the wireless divide
Let's reach out and help others embrace the new technology.
- 4 Your money**
Make your cab your mobile office
A lot of office work is now done from the tractor, truck, combine or sprayer.
- 6 Young farmer profile**
Supplying the Asian niche market
When opportunity knocked, Yohan Perreault of Quebec answered.
- 9 Ask an Expert**
Wireless wins fans in agri-food
Rob Hannam's new company will design, build and deliver mobile-enabled tools for producers.
- 18 Planning to succeed**
Reconcile to our wonderful wireless world
Wireless technology is not as complicated as it seems.
- 20 Safety on the farm**
Going wireless doesn't mean cutting ties to safety
High-powered farm machinery and multi-tasking can be a dangerous mix.

MAY / JUNE 2011

On the cover:

Yohan Perreault's Quebec operation grows specialty vegetables for wholesalers and consumers in the U.S.

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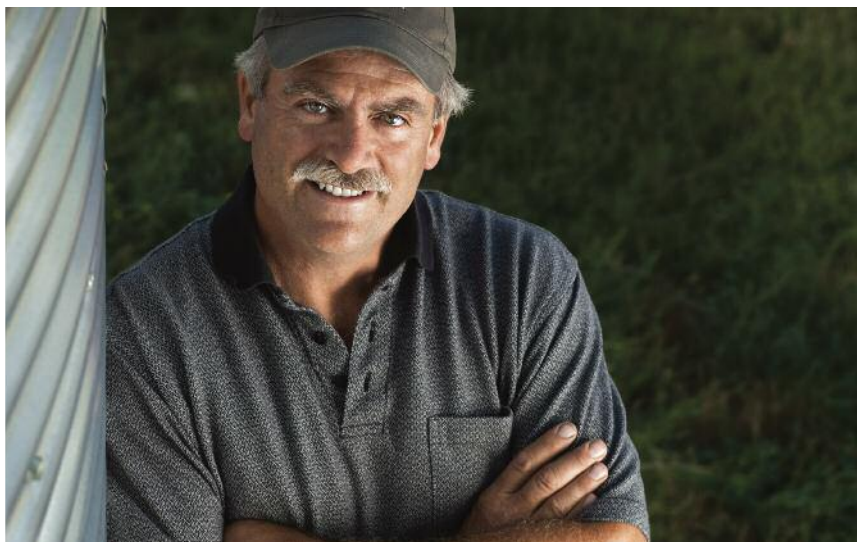
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- Canadian Farm Writers' Federation award for periodicals; Bronze 2006, 2007, Gold 2008, Bronze 2009
- Canadian Agricultural Marketing Association (CAMA) Awards; Merit 2006, 2007; Excellence 2009, 2010

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from the editor



The theme of this edition is wireless technology. I wish I could tell you that I'm a techno-wizard, but I'm not.

I've had a BlackBerry for a while and when I'm farming it's a handy tool. I email from the tractor and combine and check weather forecasts and prices, but I haven't investigated the latest apps and I haven't spent as much time as I should discovering the full potential of the technology.

Thankfully, many of my ag journalist colleagues across the country are far more knowledgeable on technology, and I've learned a lot from working with them on this edition. As you'll see from the various articles, there's no doubt that mobile technology is changing how farms are being managed.

Advances in mobile devices and the available apps are occurring rapidly. Visit Farm Credit Canada (www.fcc.ca) for updates to some of the stories in this edition.

On a different topic, how would you like to attend the best and biggest farm equipment show in the world? Agritechnica, held every second year in Hanover, Germany, boasts 18 exhibition halls, over 320,000 square metres of exhibition floor space and more than 2,300 exhibitors. The next show is in mid-November 2011.

I'm working with STEP, the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, to make the trip more attainable for interested Canadian producers. Travelling as a group will provide travel and accommodation advantages. Plus, it'll be a great networking experience. A number of ag journalists are likely to tag along with us.

Check out www.agritechnica.com, and if you'd like to know more about the group travel plans, just drop a note to kevin@hursh.ca.



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Spanning the wireless divide

Let's be practical. Not every producer is going to adopt wireless technology.

In some rural areas, marginal cell phone coverage means many technologies aren't feasible. Over time this issue will be resolved, as usability is getting easier with every release. But what about the human factor?

We all know farmers who have no interest in sending emails on smartphones, let alone downloading some newfangled app. They don't use email or Internet in their offices, so why would they want to on a cell phone?

Hands that use an impact wrench or side-grinder or calf-puller need some practice to develop the dexterity for smartphone keyboards. Especially guys who have thumbs as big as loonies. And an aging generation increasingly needs reading glasses or bifocals just to see the screen and find the right buttons to push.

The devices and apps will continue to become more user-friendly.

There are producers doing just fine without mobile technology, but in many cases the technology will still have an impact on their farms.

Many of their farming friends and neighbours will be connected, so information will be more quickly passed around the community. Plus, their business partners, spouses, employees and kids are likely to be connected.

Even some non-believers will surprise us and eventually join the 21st century.

If you've spent time in a developing nation, you probably noticed that very few houses have a land line telephone, but just about everybody seems to have a cell phone. Even in Canada, where society progressed from one to the other, many people now find it more convenient to have only a mobile phone.

Just because someone has never had a desktop computer or laptop and just because they've never used those tools for email and Internet, that doesn't mean they won't leapfrog directly to mobile technology.

The devices and apps will continue to become more user-friendly. You just have to show your Uncle Ike how easy it really is and what he can do with the technology.

But don't show him everything at once. That will just confuse him. Take a few of the functions and show him how easy something like texting is. If he wants to know more, give him something else to chew on. In the end, he may be impressed with how economical and convenient text messages can be.

Ike isn't likely to attend a workshop on wireless technology and he certainly isn't going to learn about it by surfing the web. Point out to him that his next cell phone will have more technology built in, so he might as well benefit from it.

With this sort of personal encouragement and mentorship, we'll soon have more people in agriculture participating in the mobile revolution.

BY KEVIN HURSH / *Kevin is a consulting agrologist and journalist based in Saskatoon, Sask. He also operates a grain farm near Cabri, Sask., growing a wide array of crops.*



Make your cab your mobile office

Ever since cell phones first became available more than 20 years ago, tractors have been slowly making a transition from being a farm implement into a mobile workstation. It's so common for a producer to order shipments of fuel, loads of fertilizer and sell hundreds of tonnes of crop without leaving the tractor that no one gives it a second thought.

Now with GPS-based auto-steer and computerized implement controls, farmers have even more time on their hands when they're planting, spraying, haying and harvesting.

"Mobile computing technology is evolving so fast that it's just about impossible to pin everything down," says Rick Pryor, a precision ag specialist with Delta Ag Services in Portage la Prairie, Man. "It's evolving on a weekly or perhaps even a daily basis. We're right on the edge of something that's going to change things phenomenally in agriculture."

Field scouts at Delta Ag already depend heavily on mobile computers in their trucks to quickly compile and send scouting reports to clients. The scout can print a hard copy for the client on a portable printer, or transfer the data from his laptop to the client's smartphone. The scouts don't even need to go into the office to update their files – all they need to do is drive to an area covered by the company's wireless network and file management software automatically updates and flags any client files that have changed.

Pryor says the next step is for the major equipment manufacturers to incorporate email compatibility into their variable rate controllers. That way, it will be possible for a service company to email a fertilizer prescription map to the farmer's email account and he will be able to load it directly into the rate controller.

While lots of great new mobile computing and communication technologies are out there, and more are coming down the pipeline, all are based on having a good cell phone connection. Before you go out and invest in any mobile technology, take a hard look at what the coverage options are in your area.

Service providers, cellular plans, costs, coverage and types of service vary dramatically from province to province and region to region. A smartphone that uses the latest technology might be a good option if you live near a major centre or along a major traffic corridor, but it could be comparatively useless if you live off the beaten track.

Comparecellular.com is a good one-stop website that will allow you to check and compare coverage and service plans from different companies in your region.

BY LORNE McCLINTON / *Lorne has worked in the communications field for the last 20 years as a journalist, photographer, scriptwriter and corporate writer. He divides his time between Quebec and his grain farm in Saskatchewan.*

Finding the right system

If you want to multi-task by using your extra time on the tractor to catch up on your office work, there's a lot of off-the-shelf technology to help you. Which pieces are best for you depends on how you plan to use them.

The most obvious device to start with is a smartphone, like a BlackBerry or iPhone. Most cell phone companies will give you one for next to nothing if you sign up for a three-year contract.

If you need more computer power, consider picking up a netbook or a tablet as well. Netbooks are small, inexpensive laptops that still pack a surprising amount of computing power. They have several advantages: they're relatively inexpensive but can still run full computer programs and can easily be connected to the Internet either through your smartphone or an internal card that allows access to a wireless connection.

Users will really appreciate how much easier it is to compose an email on a netbook keyboard than on a smartphone.



Tablets are starting to be another option. They are highly portable devices with an easy-to-use touch interface that offer a more flexible way to surf the Internet and use mobile apps. When most people think of tablets, they think of the Apple iPad, although other options are available. Whatever your choice, you'll want to make sure it can handle the work environment. **LM**

Toughen up

Tractors, combines and sprayers are often tough, dusty, vibration-prone environments. Electronics, especially delicate computer equipment, hate this. If you're going to use a laptop or netbook that's designed to be used in a house or office in a tractor, expect environmental conditions to cause no end of problems.

One solution is to buy a ruggedized netbook, laptop or tablet that is specifically designed to work under the harshest conditions. You could accidentally kick the best of these out of your tractor cab without hurting it. The downside is they aren't cheap. A good one can cost up to

\$5,000. You could buy 20 netbooks for the same price.

The price differential is why many people decide to take their chances and use a cheap netbook instead. While this is a sound strategy, it's important to remember that while replacing a computer is cheap, replacing data isn't. It would be wise to purchase virtual hard drive storage space on the Internet. That way when Murphy's Law catches up to you and an accident happens, you will have lost only a few minutes worth of data. **LM**



YOUNG FARMER PROFILE

Supplying the Asian niche market

In 2007, opportunity knocked – literally – at Yohan Perreault’s door. It came in the form of a food wholesaler in search of a producer willing and able to grow and supply vegetables for the Asian market in the United States.

“At the time, I was growing about 80 acres of mostly broccoli and cauliflower for sale here in Quebec,” Perreault recalls from his farm near Joliette, an hour’s drive northeast of Montreal. “But I was interested. I had the necessary experience and knowledge, so I decided to give it a try.”

Four years later, Perreault, a 34-year-old single father of four young kids, has no regrets. Au contraire. In 2010, with the help of some three dozen seasonal workers, he harvested \$1.6 million worth of Asian produce, everything from napa cabbage and Chinese and Korean radishes to eggplant and oversized carrots, from 400 acres.

Almost all of that production was shipped to the United States. Perreault supplied 10 truckloads a week of napa cabbage to Chinatowns in the United States. “This is a great niche market to be in,” he says.

In many ways, Perreault’s success is the result of his personal and professional choices. Raised on his family’s dairy farm, he passed up the chance to take over the operation from his father, Gilbert. “Animals didn’t really do much for me,” Perreault says. “I was far more interested in plants.”

After earning a technical degree in agriculture in Joliette, he spent five years selling crop inputs to farmers, first for Cargill, then for CIL. He credits both his studies and work experience for providing him with the knowledge he would soon need to grow fickle produce like Asian vegetables.





That opportunity came just two years after he bought his own property, a former tobacco farm with sandy soil. Perreault says it's perfect for the broccoli and carrots he initially produced, and the Chinese cabbages and other Asian vegetables he now grows.

Around the same time, he partnered with Julie Nichols, an agronomist and specialist in vegetable crops who runs an agricultural consulting firm. Nichols grows Asian produce on her 40-acre farm near Mont St. Hilaire, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River near Montreal. Though they grow crops separately, Perreault and Nichols sell collectively through a company called Organzo.

Their growing season begins in mid-March, when seeds for the napa cabbage, representing 65 per cent of their annual production and 75 per cent of revenues, are planted in the four greenhouses on Perreault's property. After 30 days in the greenhouse, the seedlings are transferred to the field and covered with sheets.

The first crop is ready for harvest 60 days later, beginning a weekly cycle of planting and harvesting that

continues until early August when the last crop is planted. He also plants radishes where napa has just been harvested.

When production ends in October, Perreault and Nichols head to the Produce Marketing Association's annual fresh food convention and exhibition, where they have maintained a kiosk since 2008. According to Perreault, the three-day event, which attracts some 18,500 participants from the food industry to Atlanta, has been a veritable goldmine in terms of finding new customers.

In addition to offering top-quality produce that looks and tastes good and remains firm when cooked in stir fry – a key requirement – Perreault says he and Nichols are continuing to learn the intricacies of dealing with Asian buyers.

BY MARK CARDWELL / *Mark Cardwell is a writer and freelance journalist who lives in the Quebec City region. He is a regular correspondent for a dozen newspapers, magazines, trade and specialty publications in Canada, the United States and Europe.*

Wireless wins fans in agri-food

Synthesis Agri-Food Network, based in Guelph, Ont., has listed mobile technology as one of the eight hottest agri-food trends and issues for 2011. Rob Hannam is founder and president of Synthesis.

Beyond the obvious cell phone with email capability, what else is available and coming down the pipeline that will be useful to agriculture?

There are all sorts of applications you can download onto your smartphone. In fact, once they get onto it, people tend to go app-crazy and fill up their available capacity. Then they pare it down to the apps they actually use.

I use a metric conversion app on my phone. Many producers set up apps that make it simpler to check weather and stock prices. More are coming that are specific to agriculture.

Since these aren't for a mass market, they'll cost more than the token amount that apps typically cost, but these will be game-changing management tools.

There will also be more use of QR code tools. These are the square, two-dimensional images, sort of like a bar code, that you scan to instantly retrieve content on your phone. Some conferences offer this to supply all the conference information. You'll also see owner's manuals offered this way, as well as the complete label information for crop protection products.

Beyond smartphones, tablet devices will become increasingly popular because of the larger screen and greater computing capacity.

Will the number of producers embracing wireless technology continue to grow?

Agriculture is a perfect fit because producers need to make big business decisions on the go. They're on

the tractor or sprayer, in the feedlot or moving around managing their employees. They're not sitting in an office all the time.

The Internet took years to catch on. Facebook took only months. Technology uptake is faster all the time.

As cell phones need replacing and as contracts expire, smartphones will become more widely used. Getting 3G cell coverage is important, and that's coming in more rural areas. Even faster speeds are on the way.

How does a producer make decisions about the right smartphone or tablet device and the apps that are best to have?

The key is just getting started. As you use it and try new apps, you'll figure out what device works for you. There are blogs and websites that rate new devices and new apps, but one of the best ways is to talk with friends and business contacts about what's working for them. There's a ton of value, but it takes some effort to keep up with the mobile revolution that's underway.



ROB HANNAM teamed up with a couple of other ag professionals to launch a company called AgNition Inc., which will design, build and deliver mobile-enabled tools to producers.

Wireless technologies

open new frontiers for farmers

Has your farm gone wireless? Now's the time to think about some of the new communications technologies that will change your daily routine from one of feeding livestock and other chores to updating your global positioning system (GPS) as well.

"I don't get up at 6 a.m. to milk cows any more, I get up to do emails," says Terry Murray, President of Eastern View Farms in Wainwright, Alta.

With wireless technologies and various smartphone applications, farmers can download software to do precise input calculations and other projections. Last year, AGCanada.com released a mobile application (an "app") called "AGReader Mobile" where farmers can access up-to-date market prices, weather forecasts, and the latest farming stories. And with over 300,000 apps available, there's one for everything from online banking to remotely accessing livestock birthing dates.

Wireless devices like smartphones (such as the BlackBerry or iPhone) and tablet computers (Apple iPad or Samsung's Galaxy) connect to the Internet and other communications services using both wireless (Wi-Fi) and cellular networks so producers can access the internet anywhere, at any time. Not sure which herbicide to use on your strawberries under current conditions? Instead of having to go to the house or office to look for manuals, you can search the name of the products being considered – or strawberries and the conditions – on your web browser and find information on which choice to make, right out in the field.

Wireless technologies with an internet connection have helped Julie Tardif, owner of Glenorra Farms in Ormstown, Que., be more efficient and organized. She keeps in touch with customers by email, and keeps herself organized with the detailed e-calendar on her phone. Since that device is synchronized with the laptop she brings into the barn to input inventory, she also saves time because the updated information is recorded directly into her files. Everything from farmers markets, to crop planting dates, to her two children's busy schedules is accessible to her at any time.

And then there is GPS. Producers know precisely where each tree, ditch and large rock is as they maneuver through the field guided by computer technology. Large operations can also track exactly where their tractors are in each field. The application of these wireless technologies has changed how farming operates.

"Many farmers use GPS: it's an amazing farming tool. And then there are some farmers who are grower-packer-shippers who use wireless technology for precise traceability for their produce," says Avia Eek of Eek Farms in the Holland Marsh just north of Toronto, Ont.

As more towers are built and providers upgrade to 4G networks across Alberta, Terry Murray says there will be fewer spots in his fields where he doesn't have a cellular signal, so he can set up the GPS in his tractor to work on the fields and have a conference call at the same time. When time is of the essence – which on the farm is often – multi-tasking is possible and easier



thanks to smartphones. Murray believes there are no boundaries on what these technologies will be able to do for farmers, including instant communications between employees when there's a decision to be made or a problem to deal with.

Julie Tardif is a good example of pushing those boundaries. While she's picking tomatoes in the field for her Community Supported Agriculture market garden enterprise, she's still connected to her customers through her BlackBerry. She often gets emails requesting increased orders, and says it's a great timesaver to know while she is still in the fields that she needs to grab another 20 pounds of tomatoes.

However, smartphones are not built like tractors and Tardif hopes that the technology will become more durable. "I like the idea of the iPad, having your whole computer with you, but it's too fragile to use on the farm." Even her BlackBerry has taken a beating: the dirt from her hands sometimes locks up the keys, and it isn't very weather-proof.

And because smartphones and the wireless gizmos that make them work aren't like many of the other pieces of equipment on a farm, there's a learning curve to their effective use.

"I know that there are ways to print wirelessly from my BlackBerry, but I still need to look into it," Tardif says.

But many producers are becoming more active in their approach to adopting wireless technologies. Avia Eek says she stays informed through farm seminars, workshops, word of mouth, public meetings and, of course, the Internet.

"If you invest the time initially, to learn about it, apply it, and make it part of your every day schedule, wireless technology can be one of the farmer's best tools in today's business world," Eek says.

Farmers are using the Internet to check on product prices, arrange orders to stores, see what the weather will be, and keep abreast of any new information that may be available in various farm magazines and periodicals.

Eek hopes that producers will use wireless technology to communicate with consumers directly, so they can understand where their food is coming from. She thinks some are underestimating the power of wireless technology, missing opportunities such as Facebook and Twitter, to connect with consumers on a continuing and real-time basis.

Although it might be intimidating at first, using wireless technologies on the farm will most definitely help the farm stay on top of new research and ideas, have more efficient and organized operations, and stay connected with the world wherever they are. The new image of a farmer is one with a smartphone in one hand and a laptop in the other.

BY HUGH MAYNARD AND CHRISTINA FRANC / *Hugh is a specialist in agricultural communications based in Ormstown, Que. A graduate in farm management from Macdonald College (McGill University), Hugh is a seasoned journalist and broadcaster. Christina is a communications co-ordinator for Qu'anglo Communications and Consulting. She is also studying journalism at Carleton University.*

Take the smart approach to mobile

If the time has come to buy your first smartphone, you're not alone. The current trend suggests that by the end of this year, 40 to 50 per cent of North American farmers will have a smartphone with them all the time.

A smartphone is a mobile phone that can also handle email, browse the Internet, has GPS capability, takes videos and photos, and can use various device-specific software applications. It's a powerful management tool for progressive farmers who view the desktop computer as a ball and chain.

There are numerous platforms and devices to choose from, but selecting the right service provider is probably more important than the device itself.

Before you sign a three-year commitment with a mobile service provider, talk to local salespeople or neighbours who have had a smartphone for a while. Find out which service provider they use and if they're happy with them. Keep in mind you must have 3G speed to get reasonable smartphone performance.

You can expect to pay between \$25 and \$85 for a data plan that includes email and web access. This is in addition to your cell phone plan. Most of the horror stories you hear about exorbitant mobile bills are due to excess phone minutes – not email, text or web

surfing. Unless you're viewing movies on your smartphone, you likely won't need a plan that offers more than 500 megabytes (MB) of data per month.

Signing a three-year deal can make a smartphone more affordable, but leaving the contract before it expires can be expensive. A month-to-month plan means you pay more for the device, but you're free to change providers if advantageous or necessary.

Selecting the right service provider is probably more important than the device itself.

It's wise to protect your smartphone investment with a "ruggedized" case or sleeve. It's even possible to buy waterproof cases. These devices are quite robust and will take a certain amount of abuse, but the farm environment will test their limits.

Device selection is important, but the true value of a smartphone is based on how it's used and the willingness of the user to explore and maximize the potential of the technology.

Buyer's Guide

All the smartphone devices and platforms available offer similar functionality. The choice comes down to which devices are supported by your service provider, personal preference (real keyboard versus on-screen keyboard) and perhaps most importantly, the availability of apps that really enhance the power of your smartphone.



BlackBerry



Apple iPhone



Windows Mobile 7



Android

To learn more about smartphone technology in agriculture, check out a video interview with Peter Gredig at www.fcc.ca/agrisuccess.

BY PETER GREDIG / *Peter Gredig is a corn, soybean and wheat producer based near London, Ont., who has a background in agricultural media and communications. He's president of Kettle Creek Communications and is working with a number of organizations on strategies and tools that use mobile technologies to help Canadian farmers.*

BlackBerry

BlackBerrys have a strong reputation for email proficiency and their easy-to-use Messenger application. Web access has been a weakness, but recent device offerings such as the Torch offer vastly improved web browsing capability. It's estimated that 80 to 85 per cent of smartphone-using farmers carry this brand. There are currently about 80,000 apps available – most developed for agriculture in Canada will initially target BlackBerry users because of strong market share.

Apple iPhone

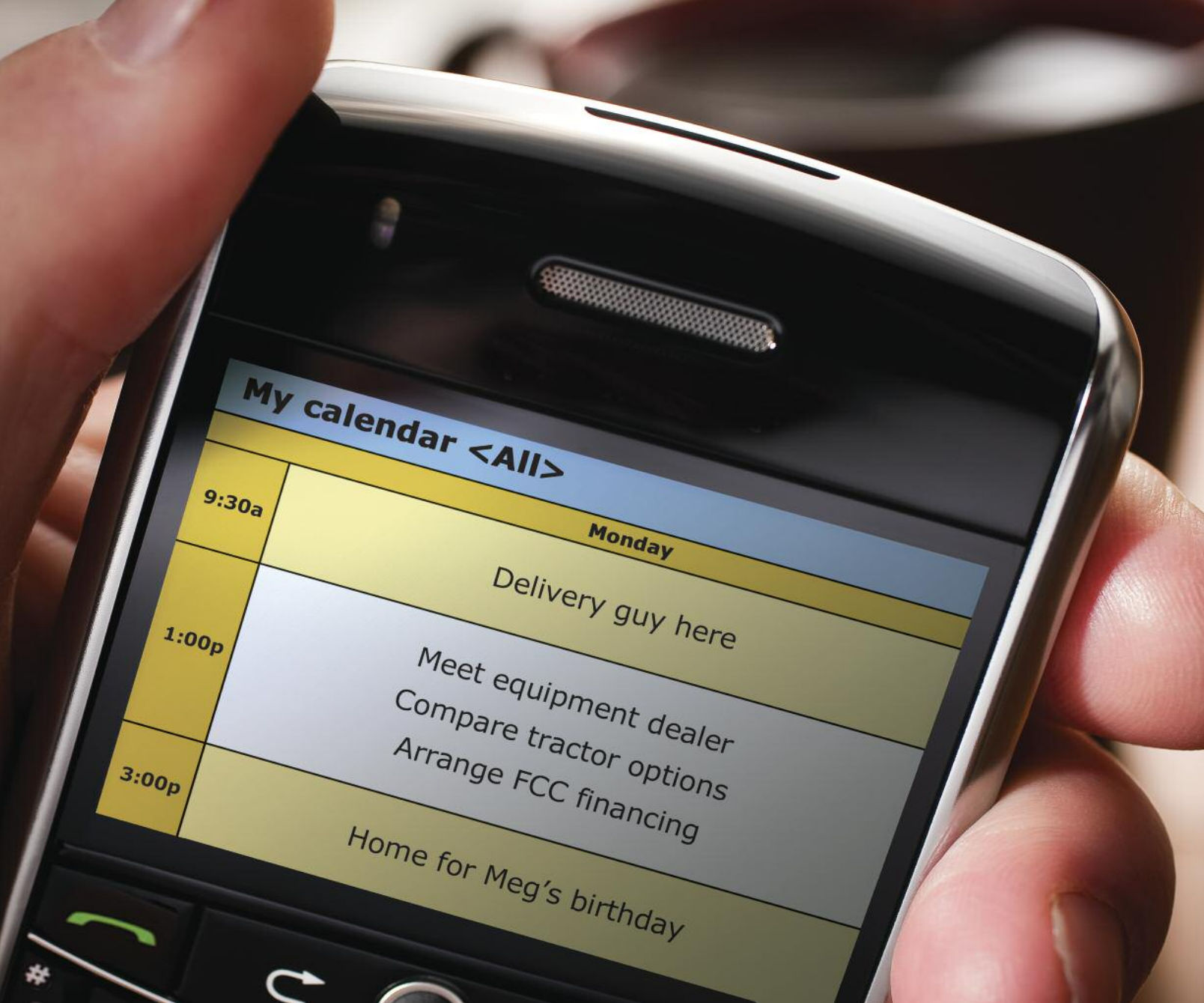
The iPhone is known for its video viewing prowess and web surfing capabilities. Email service has not been the strong suit of the iPhone and unlike the BlackBerry, users must adapt to the on-screen keyboard – which takes some getting used to. The iPhone is gaining in popularity due to its intuitive programming and the vast number of apps available (over 300,000 and growing). Because the iPhone has greater support among U.S. farmers, there are more ag-related apps available, but they're not likely to target Canadian producers.

Android

Backed by Google, the Android platform has been very popular in the U.S. (less so in Canada). It supports many smartphone brands, including HTC, Samsung, LG and Motorola. Like BlackBerry, the Android platform is seeing an explosion of new apps. At this time, the ag-specific apps tend to be U.S. focused.

Windows Mobile 7

Windows launched their mobile platform near the end of 2010. It remains to be seen how popular the Windows smartphone will be. At this time, it's probably not the device of choice for agriculture, but reviews of available devices have been very positive. Apps are easy to develop for this platform, so there should be plenty to choose from in the future.



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Explore Twitter and Facebook for business

With 500 million active users on Facebook and 175 million on Twitter, they're likely two of the social media platforms that you've heard of. But unless you venture onto the websites yourself, it's hard to appreciate what they're really all about.

Facebook could be compared to an online high school or family reunion, and Twitter is more like a worldwide virtual chamber of commerce meeting. And just like there are business opportunities in the real world when you see those people in the flesh, they're there in the virtual world too.

When you're at your reunion or chamber meeting, you can walk over to a stranger and introduce yourself, find a familiar face to hang out with or stand alone and hope

someone notices you. With social media sites, you make the same kinds of choices – stand back and observe what's going on, hang out with friends or venture out on your own.

And just as you may go to those physical meetings representing your business or as just yourself, you can use social media in the same way – on Twitter under your business name, or with what Facebook calls an official page.

Putting social media to work

If you're new to the experience, your first steps can be just signing up and looking around. Once you get a feel for what the sites offer, you can decide how you're going to make them work for you and your business.



First, start connecting with those who can help you achieve your goal. If you want to draw local customers to your direct sales operation, you can connect with them. If your goal is to get a broader view of Canadian or worldwide agriculture and keep a watchful eye on input and commodity prices, find those users and connect with them.

Twitter is about making connections and gathering and sharing information, which you do by “following” people who have similar interests. Twitter is also the place to go for breaking news and fast information. If a major event happens somewhere around the globe, it will be reported here before it’s on any other media.

Once you sign up, search the Twitter site for the name of your community or province to find local users. Chances are, you’ll find someone you know or someone you’ve heard of, like local media or producer organizations. You can then check out who they follow and choose to follow some of the same people or groups.

Twitter is a place for immediate information exchange; Facebook pages offer the chance to create relationships with customers.

You can also search the site by topic. Click the “who to follow” tab and it will walk you through searches of key words and suggest other Twitter users. Many users organize people they follow into lists. Once you find users with similar interests, look at their lists to see who you might want to follow.

You can also make Twitter work for you when you team it up with your cell phone. If you’re set up to receive text messages, you can turn on text message alerts for some – or all – of the people you follow. You’ll receive an instant text message for weather updates, market fluctuations or whatever else you choose.

While Twitter is a place for immediate information exchange, Facebook pages offer the chance to create relationships with customers. If you do direct sales, it creates an opportunity to give your business a presence on the Internet. Once you have a page for your business, you need 25 different users to click on the “like” button. At that number, you’re allowed to secure that page and its name – essentially, your Facebook page becomes your website. It’s an inexpensive, simple way to promote your farm or product on the Internet. Updates and photographs are easy to post, and you can include the page location on your business cards or other advertisements.

Turning social networking into business networking is just like networking in a room full of people. It takes practice. For those who work at it, it becomes an extremely beneficial element in their business.

For specific instructions on how to get started on Facebook or Twitter, visit www.fcc.ca/agrisuccess.

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE / *Allison specializes in cultivating words. Based in New Brunswick, she is an agriculture and business communicator with nearly two decades of experience. She contributes to publications nationwide and works to help industry promote farming and rural living.*

There's an app for that

Cell phones now do a lot more than make phone calls and send text messages. BlackBerry, iPhone, Android and other smartphones can be used for email, surfing the Internet and running small but powerful software applications. Smartphone applications, commonly known as apps, are available to do practically anything you can think of. They have the potential to change the way you manage your farm.

Want to pay your bills using your financial institution's online banking system? There's an app for that. Want to calculate the plant population in your Dekalb corn? There's an app for that. Want to double-check the proper sequence for mixing your DuPont herbicides? There's an app for that. Want to check the latest market information and news stories in the Western Producer? There's an app for that, too.

While smartphones now come pre-installed with general information apps, like ones to check the weather or some news services, it's still largely up to users to customize the phone by selecting which ones they want to run. For example, a beef or sheep producer might find that a free Android-based app like Livestock Manager (Google Android "Livestock Manager") is a handy tool to keep track of the herd. The Cattle Breakeven Calculator at the iPhone app store can be used to figure out what price you need to break even on fed cattle.

Grain and oilseed producers might want to look into a program like the one from Loadout Technologies. You can fill a grain truck from a bin – using the Loadout system and an iPhone app to operate a controller box with a video camera – without having to leave the comfort of the truck. It offers a glimpse into a future where mobile computer systems can be used to make all kinds of farm jobs a little easier.

There are hundreds of thousands of smartphone apps to choose from. Some are free, but many cost a token

amount. Not all will work on every operating system. Some will only work on an iPhone, and others only on BlackBerry, Android, Symbian or Windows Mobile 7 phones. The iPhone platform boasts the largest number of apps but after a slow start, the others are quickly building up their selections.

The number of apps available is growing on an almost hourly basis. You can find the newest by going to your smartphone's app store and typing "agriculture" into the search engine. It's also possible to find many with a standard Internet search.

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Need help getting started? Google these organizations and check out the apps they offer.

Agrian Mobile Information Center
 Dekalb Plant Population Calculator
 DTN – The Progressive Farmer
 DuPont
 Farm Futures News
 Farmers Partner
 Growing Degree Day Calculator
 Ipest
 Livestock Manager
 Loadout
 Project Noah
 Syngenta Farm Mobile
 The Western Producer
 What's Invasive

Or, read this story at www.fcc.ca/agrisuccess and connect to the apps directly.

Reconcile to our wonderful wireless world

Imagine yourself working away on your tractor out on the back 40 acres, sending “tweets” out to all your Twitter fans using your iPad or smartphone. After you stop laughing (I’m exaggerating on the fan part), I’d ask you to reconsider this scenario.

All the marketing hype about using wireless devices seems centred on chic people hanging out in big city cafés, but there’s lots of potential for farmers, from feeding cows to customer relations.

Smartphones can provide access to data in real time. What does that mean? You can keep track of commodity prices throughout the day, making when to phone in buy/sell decisions more timely – and profitable. Instant updates can come to you automatically, some in the form of tweets.

You’re standing in your strawberry patch and you see that the berries are ready to pick, so you send out a message using social media such as Facebook and Twitter. You can let 10,000 potential customers know instantly that your u-pick is open for business today, something that would have cost hefty fees for radio advertising in the past.

With a wireless connection linked to a webcam, you can keep an eye on calving pens, coyotes, and even your customers. If you have line of site, a pair of wireless

antennae hooked up to a computer will allow you – without an Internet connection – to keep watch on the barn or livestock site or fruit stand, even if it’s kilometres away. All for just a few hundred bucks and a local high school kid who can help you set it all up just for the fun of it (another exaggeration – you should compensate him or her appropriately).

There’s lots of potential for farmers, from feeding cows to customer relations.

The point is, wireless technology is not as complicated as it seems and all this is possible now, not in the future. As you finish up with the tractor on the back 40, the last few passes are going to make you late for chores. Connect your smartphone to the control panel in the barn and get some feed unloading into the bunkers.

Still not convinced? A data plan for an iPad, which you can use to make a “video” call back to the house to check in, starts for as little as \$15 per month. Your family may not care much about your tweets, but they sure will be fans of a farmer who uses technology like that.

BY HUGH MAYNARD

Fundraising?

Maybe FCC can help

Are you raising money for a capital project in rural Canada? Your organization may qualify for a donation between \$5,000 and \$25,000 from the FCC AgriSpirit Fund.

Find examples of past projects at www.AgriSpirit.ca.

Apply online between May 2 and June 13.



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Going wireless doesn't mean cutting ties to safety

There's no doubting the benefits of wireless technology in the world of agriculture, including many safety benefits. But is the increased productivity also raising the stakes in regards to farm safety? Glen Blahey thinks so.

"The use of cell phones and auto-steer equipment really helps field work and communication ability," says Blahey, a health and safety specialist with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association – or CASA – which works to reduce injuries and enhance safety practices.

Challenges arise when operators of wide, high-powered farm machinery are electronically multi-tasking while at the wheel.

"Even though they are travelling slowly, there is so much horsepower and the equipment covers such large surface areas that serious injury can occur quickly if something happens," Blahey adds. "Operator alertness is critical."

Though few farming accidents have been blamed on the use – or rather misuse – of wireless technology in Canada, he says mounting anecdotal evidence suggests they are occurring.

"Unless serious injury results, they go unreported," Blahey says. "But we're hearing of cases."

Most incidents likely involve damage to machinery, buildings or transmission towers, some of which have been knocked down by passing tractors using older GPS systems that do not have such obstructions plotted.

"If you're going a mile in a straight line with no turns, you can be lulled into a false sense of security," Blahey says. "But if you're not paying attention because you're texting

somebody or you're checking crop prices or the weather on the Internet, there's a real risk of catastrophic accident."

Jim Wasserman agrees. As vice-president of the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute, an independent applied-research organization that develops and evaluates agricultural machinery for producers and manufacturers, he's had a front-row seat the past 30 years to watch the evolution of technology.

Despite safety-related designs and fail-safe features, he notes that all these systems are designed for operational control. As a result, operators are ultimately responsible for the care and control of equipment and vehicles.

"Using these systems on farm equipment is no different from driving a car down the highway with the cruise control on while talking or texting on a cell phone," Wasserman says. "Serious problems can occur when operators put excessive confidence in these systems or fail to manage the associated risks."

BY MARK CARDWELL

CCHSA celebrates 25 years working for Canadian agriculture

Thanks to the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture, our farms and rural communities are growing safer and healthier. www.cchsa-ccssma.usask.ca



FROM FCC

Canadian farmland values continue to rise

The average value of Canadian farmland increased 2.1 per cent during the last six months of 2010, according to the Farm Credit Canada (FCC) spring 2011 Farmland Values Report. This followed increases of 3.0 and 3.6 per cent in the previous two semi-annual reporting periods. Canadian farmland values have risen steadily during the last decade.

"FCC is committed to advancing the business of agriculture and one of the ways to do this is by providing producers with our market based observations twice a year to help them make timely management decisions," says Michael Hoffer, FCC Senior Vice-President, Portfolio and Credit Risk.

Land is one of agriculture's most important assets. FCC's Farmland Values Report, published each spring and fall, provides valuable information about changes and trends in land values across Canada. FCC has produced this one-of-a-kind report since 1984.

Farmland values remained stable or increased in all provinces. Prince Edward Island experienced the highest average increase at 3.2 per cent, followed by Saskatchewan at 2.7 per cent.

New Brunswick and Ontario each saw 2.4 per cent growth, followed by Alberta at 1.5 per cent and Manitoba at 1.3 per cent.

Quebec (0.9 per cent), Nova Scotia (0.6 per cent) and British Columbia (0.4 per cent) rounded out the list of provinces that experienced a rise in farmland values.

Values were unchanged in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"Canadian land values are strong and, looking at world markets in our current financing environment, there are factors in place that could exert further upward pressure on the price of farmland," says Jean-Philippe Gervais, FCC Senior Agriculture Economist. "Rising incomes and population growth in emerging countries is increasing the demand for ag commodities at a time when global cereal stocks are low, production conditions in some major grain producing countries could potentially be challenging and the availability of quality farmland worldwide is limited."

In addition to current data for each province, the Farmland Values Report shows trends over time and provides a narrative that details specific drivers of land values. The Report is a valuable decision-making tool for owners, renters, buyers and sellers of agriculture land.

The complete Farmland Values Report is available at www.farmlandvalues.ca.



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