The Precision Farming event 2013

Practical advice for putting precision farming into practice.

An exceptionally high number of visitors and exhibitors attended this year's Precision Farming event. Farmers, students, agronomists and contractors were in force looking at the latest systems and services designed to improve accuracy, cut costs and increase efficiency.

"The event has been running for 17 years and we were delighted with the number of visitors considering the dry weather leading up to the event," says organiser Andy Newbold of FarmSmart Events. "Whether you want to investigate autosteer or understand how to spread fertiliser more accurately, you are a GPS novice or an experienced campaigner, the event has definitely become one of the best places to get advice and guidance about what's on the market."

It was also the launch pad for Ursula Agriculture's announcement that it is ready to compete commercially. The company has pioneered a new approach to precision agriculture by delivering, state of the crop intelligence, on time to aid and inform agricultural decision making. Five new products were launched and Director Steve Keyworth commented: "This is an exciting time for us. We've come a long way from our first tentative flights in 2011 to today when we are launching a range of farm intervention products, which we think will strike a chord with farmers, growers and their agronomists. There's a lot more to come too in 2013 and we are very excited by the prospects," continued Keyworth.

The seminars were packed and the programme kicked off with Simon Griffin from SOYL introducing the company's new performance mapping algorithm. One simple Performance Map can analyse trends built over a number of seasons from information hidden in a bank of yield maps. The Performance Map then forms the base for an investigative 'roadmap' to improve yields.

Presentations were also given by Clive Blacker from Precision Decisions, talking about how to manage variable canopies for the coming season. Professor Simon Blackmore from Harper Adams University presented the latest developments in Precision Farming, highlighting new technologies such as machine vision, mechanical weeding, laser weeding and unmanned aerial vehicles and Farmer Andrew Martin from Broadstream Farming talked about his experiences with new precision technology.

The exhibition area displayed a wide range of control terminals, GP receivers and systems and visitors were able to talk to suppliers about soil sampling, find out how to map fields to vary fertiliser rates, see systems to control sprayers and spreaders as well as a range of computer software to manage, map and record applications.

The events crop protection partner BASF was promoting its agronomy tools for cereals. Its Green Area Index (GAI) app for use in oilseed rape provides an accurate and consistent assessment of the crops' green area index (GAI) from a digital photograph. The size of the oilseed rape crop canopy is a critical indicator for several management decisions regarding nitrogen and growth regulator application.

Garford Farm Machinery was promoting a new addition to its hoe range and the latest version of its row weeder, the Mark II. This machine locates individual plants and is able to weed both between the plants and between the rows to give full weed control.

John Deere won a SIMA 2013 silver medal for its new Remote Display Access (RDA) system. Available commercially later this year it allows remote access to the on-board GreenStar display unit. This means that the operator working on a tractor, combine harvester, self-propelled sprayer or forage harvester can receive immediate, real-time assistance from the fleet or farm manager, or directly from the dealer – for example, to get support for machine and implement set-up (including ISOBUS), optimisation and troubleshooting. With this technology, potential machine downtime or insufficient use of the equipment in the field can be significantly reduced.

Summing up Andy Newbold said: Once again the event provided a great opportunity to find out the latest thinking on making precision farming work and getting to grips with the kit. The plugfest was particularly well received throughout the day, as growers considered their options.

This year's attendance is testimony to farmer's appetite to learn and the absolute necessity of using every tool to its best on farm.

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Leader of the pack

Compatibility is key for precision management systems.

FarmWorks™ continues to lead the pack in precision farming management by focusing on software and hardware solutions that rely on compatibility. Data compatibility and the ability to process large amounts of data can become overwhelming, but the right system in place can make a huge difference in making informed management decisions about future operations.

Data import and export options for third-party manufacturers make it easy to view and analyse yield data while the Connected Farm™ adds additional wireless communication between the office and field. Data transfer time between office and field can be reduced or eliminated, and has the added bonus of fuel savings. The same DCM-300 modem that is used for wireless data exchange can be enhanced for many other functions within Connected Farm. For example, the modem can be connected directly to a vehicle's OAN bus to deliver live data such as fuel, engine and performance indicators via the web. Tracking asset location, movement and use is also possible, and enables the efficient deployment of both vehicles and operators during busy periods such as harvest.

Farm Works' long-standing field software, now called Mobile, not only facilitates collection of boundary, sampling, and scouting data but also variable rate application of product. Once yield or other point data has been analysed in the office with Mapping, application maps can be produced for use on a variety of manufacturer displays or Mobile, ensuring that the correct areas of crop cover and fields are being treated. The result being a more efficient allocation of resources that leads to cost savings and, hopefully, greater yields.

Two new additional rugged handheld computers with internal GPS are now available from FarmWorks. The Juno® T41 and Yuma® 2, with different specification and accessory options, are part of the constantly evolving software and hardware portfolio designed to bring powerful field data logging within reach of farmers, agronomists and contractors alike. More information can be found at www.farmworks.com/uk/products/computers

Portable RTK level accuracy for topographical mapping is also available with the WM-Topo™ system. The system includes a Trimble Nomad handheld computer and a pole-mounted GNSS receiver. The lightweight WM-Topo system can be carried into hard-to-reach areas such as ditches and steep terrain, muddy fields, and fields with mature crop cover. This system can be used as an alternative to, or supplant, survey work previously conducted on the FmX® integrated display, providing a more portable option for data collection in terrain that is difficult to access. Farmers and drainage and levelling contractors alike can use the WM-Topo system to collect topographical data across a field, which can then be used to create a 3D model of the field in Farm Works Surface.

Also available from the iIunes and Google Play stores, the Connected Farm app can now calculate recommended nitrogen rates using NDVI crop readings taken by the GreenSeeker handheld crop sensor. This is an easy-to-use measurement device designed to assess the health of a crop.

More information on the app can be found at www.farmworks.com/uk/products/conne.

tectedfarmapp.php, and more on the handheld GreenSeeker at www.farmworks.com/uk/products/green

seeker handheld

URSULA Agriculture launched

Unmanned aerial system set to take off.

Last month saw the launch of URSULA Agriculture Ltd, a commercial company built on the solid research and technical excellence. URSULA Agriculture is pioneering a new approach to precision agriculture by delivering timely, state of the crop intelligence to directly inform agricultural decision making and intervention. Its advanced analysis algorithms combine Unmanned Aerial System (UAS), satellite and agricultural data to deliver results that increase yield, optimise inputs and improve efficiency.

Over the last few years we have carried out a continuous flying and data collection programme using our own UAS. This has taken place over arable farms across England and Wales working with individual farmers, growers' organisations and other specialist service providers in the agriculture supply chain. Data capture focused on a number of crop varieties including winter wheat, vining peas, oilseed rape, sugar beet, and potatoes backed up by extensive in field validation. Through a combination of sensors and cameras together with advanced remote sensing techniques and know how, the team has moved its knowledge forward to a stage where it can enter the market.

Today URSULA Agriculture is introducing five main product families. First up URSULA Performance™, which is aimed at detecting a wide range of crop performance issues from emergence to maturity, vigour and senescence. URSULA Scout™ provides intelligence about disease and weed infestation and includes the Blackgrass service introduced at LAMMA in January. URSULA Compliance™ provides farmers with detailed agri-environment analysis to support their Single Payment Scheme submissions. URSULA Farm View™ provides whole farm analysis including 3D models for taking slopese and drainage issues. Finally URSULA Trials™ where URSULA algorithms are applied to imagery gathered by our UAS to enable rapid assessment of individual plots over a whole variety trial scheme.

URSULA Agriculture will provide UAS or satellite data appropriate to the application, processing and analysis, in field validation and delivery of data in a format compatible with Farm Management Systems and GPS enabled machinery.

"This is an exciting time for us," said Director Steve Keyworth. "We've come a long way from our first tentative flights in 2011 to today when we are launching a range of farm intervention products which we think will strike a chord with farmers, growers and their agronomists. As well as specialist service providers up and down the agriculture supply chain. There's a lot more to come in 2013 and we are very excited by the prospects," continued Keyworth.

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