Written by Elizabeth Barrett Friday, 22 January 2010 14:43 -



Not only does Hope Lewis sell agricultural products like global positioning system (GPS) technology, she swears by it.

Lewis joined Fairbanks International of Lexington in October 2008 as a precision farming specialist.

GPS can be used to increase profitability in several ways.

For example, a GPS system can include hydraulically automated steering in tractors and combines.

That means producers can watch the combine head or planter as the combine or tractor automatically drives precisely up and down rows.

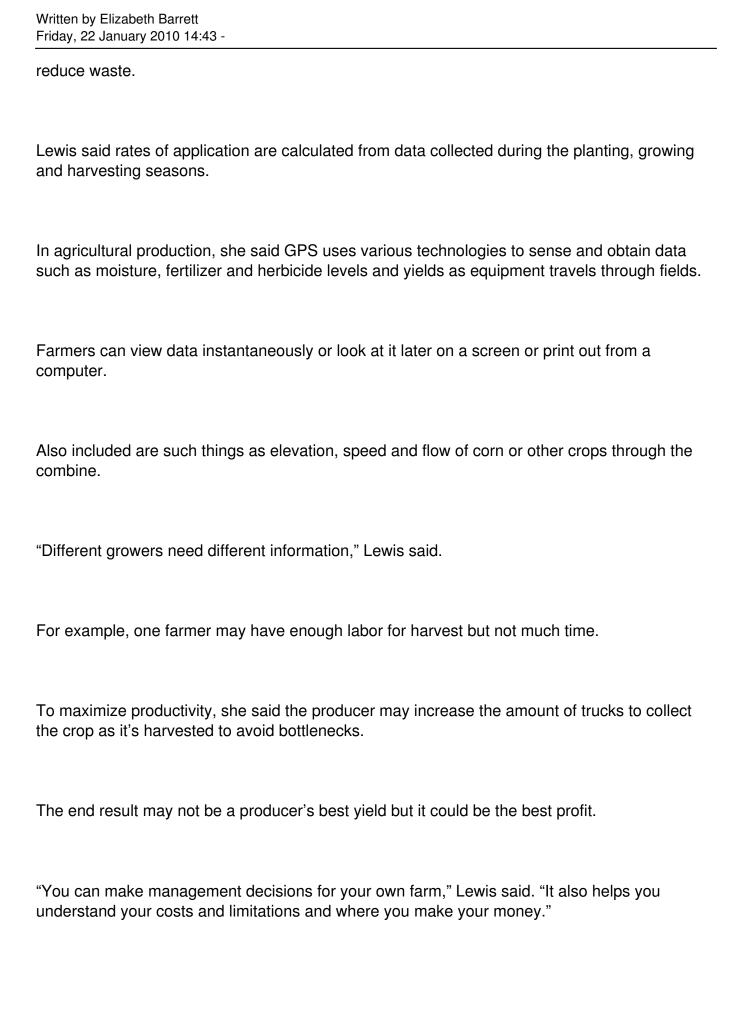
Instead of having to also concentrate on keeping straight lines through the rows, Lewis said farmers can watch for other things like a head clogged with corn or debris.

"They don't spend hours in the cab trying to drive straight in the field and go home feeling destroyed," she explained. "There are plenty of other things to worry about."

Productivity increases because rows are planted and harvested precisely.

Through GPS and data collected by using the technology, she said producers also determine exact application amounts of fertilizer, pesticide and water that not only increase yields but

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Lewis said GPS technology, as applied to agriculture, has been in existence for about 15 years.

She estimates that about 60% of Gothenburg area producers use the technology.

Systems can range from a basic model at \$2,100 to one with planter control that could easily reach \$100,000 or more.

The agricultural industry first began using GPS during harvest, Lewis said, when producers determined their location through the technology and what rows remained to pick.

"Now it's been applied to productivity such as steering a tractor on its own," Lewis said.

Without GPS technology, she said producers never know precisely how many nutrients and how much soil conductivity and organic matter are in the soil among other things.

With the technology, producers can sample soil in the off season to determine soil types and nutrient content.

"GPS allows you to know these things exactly and look over them during the winter to decide what to do the next year," Lewis said.

Next year is already here with planting season about three months away.

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