

News Column

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Calling all precision agriculture geeks

Ok-- maybe I should say precision agriculture technology enthusiasts. If you are one, or wishing to be one, you might be interested to know there is an association of farmers who meet yearly called the Kansas Ag Research & Technology Association (KARTA). As mentioned it is mainly a group of farmers, with a mix of university/extension and industry folks from throughout the state.

According to the brochure, their conference is an applied workshop consolidating information about new and old technologies with a focus on supporting scientifically valid on-farm research efforts and increasing overall farm business profitability. The on-farm research is actually done by the farmers in this association and funds/grants are even allocated to dues paying members conducting on-farm research to help with defraying possible expenses. If grant money is received the recipient is expected to give a formal report at the conference on the results of the on-farm study.

This group is well organized and has been around for 18 years now, but my guess is a lot of farmers don't know they exist. You can become a member and pay annual dues plus the conference fee or even come to the conference as a non-member paying a little higher conference fee and reap the benefits of the information and networking opportunities as well. There are various vendors representing a broad spectrum of agriculture technology services, equipment and companies from large well-known companies to the small start-ups in the machinery shed.

I have attended the conference and can say it is well worth the time and money. If you are a farmer that is interested or wants to go to the next level with precision agriculture technologies and applying them to your own farm for enhanced data collection, profitability or whatever the case may be, this conference and association may be a good fit. You could say it is a grass-roots group of farmers teaching and learning from each other's trial and errors.

Just to give you a sample of some of this year's presentations and speakers: "Precision Ag Perspective of a Researcher, Consultant, and Farmer" by Chad Godsey of Godsey Precision Ag. Chad was an extension agronomist but went back to the farm after his father's sudden death to continue the family farm and is now helping others as a consultant. Another presentation will be on "Putting sUAV's to Work" by Troy Grimes, A+ Ag Consulting. "Automated Soil Testing" a producer panel will be another presentation and of course there is more.

This two day conference is held on January 22-23, 2015 at the Salina Ambassador Hotel & Conference Center. You can attend one or both days. To find out more about the Association and conference and to even see some of the past on-farm research efforts and results go to www.kartaonline.org