



WEATHER

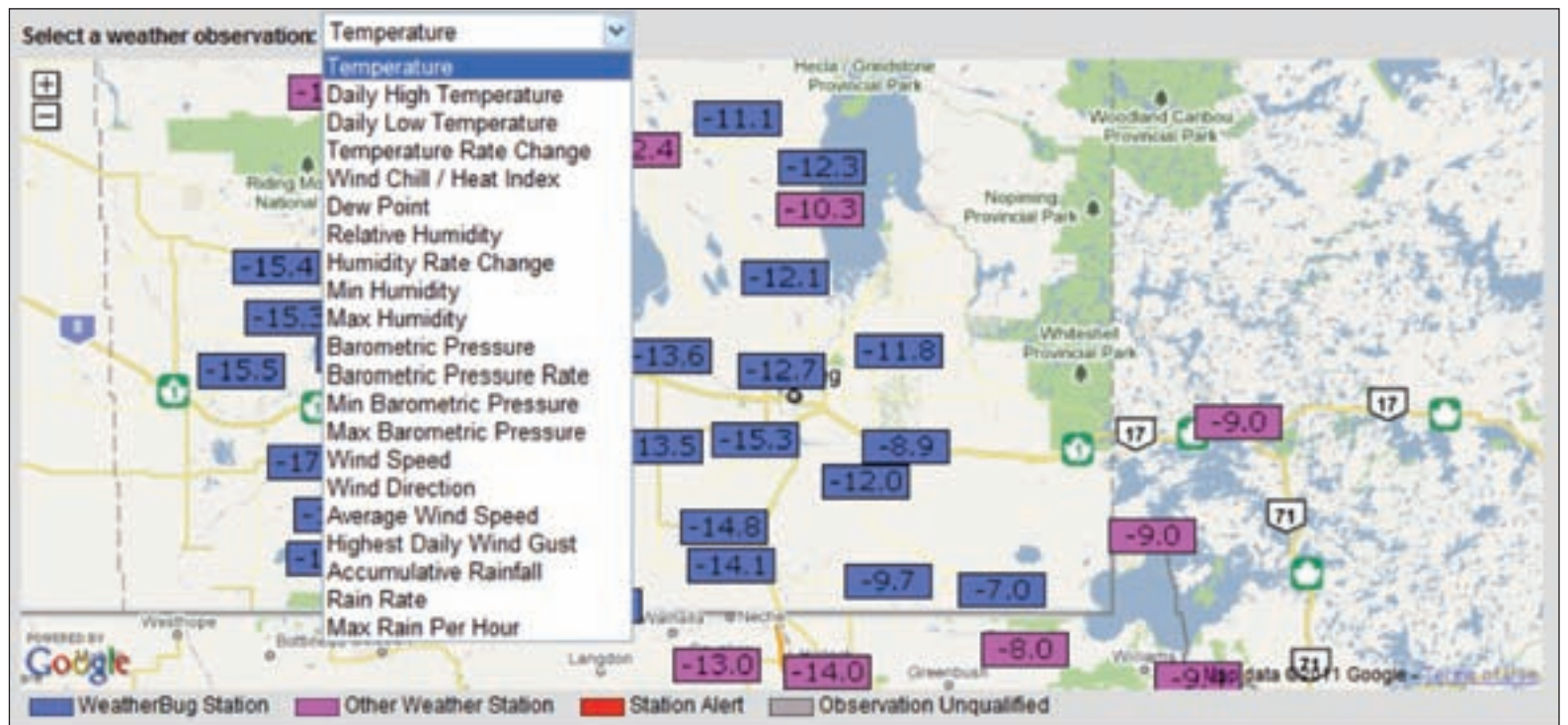
WeatherFarm adds forecast options, GDD models

Many decisions made on the farm, from seeding, to spraying, to harvest, revolve around what the weather is about to do. WeatherFarm's expanded services may help

BY ANDREA HILDERMAN

WeatherFarm is a one-stop shop for integrated weather information and crop decision support tools," says Guy Ash, WeatherFarm manager for the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). Ash leads the CWB's weather network project that was launched in August 2007 to establish an interlinked system of farm-based weather monitoring stations across the Prairies. WeatherFarm itself was launched December 2009 and the network has grown into the most extensive weather monitoring network and decision support network in Western Canada.

WeatherFarm is a free, online weather and modeling service that only requires farmers have access to high-speed Internet service. It offers farmers current weather information for their local area from a system of 800-plus WeatherBug weather stations located on farms, at agri-retailers, rural municipalities and grain elevators across the Prairies. It also gathers Environment Canada weather data from its array of stations.



An example of the weather station observation values you would see with WeatherFarm. (These values are from January, by the way). The drop down list shows all the weather variable values you can access.

since August 2007. "It's great," he says, "to have live weather data for my farm. I have a Blackberry app I can use any place and know exactly what is happening with humidity and wind speed. I can be doing one job, check my Blackberry and know that that afternoon I'll be baling hay. I don't have to go out and throw dirt in the air to check the wind for drying."

Kletke uses his Blackberry app when he's in the sprayer. "Say I'm spraying headlands," he says. "I'll check my Blackberry and if the wind is in the right direction I can spray another headland knowing the wind is not going to blow my spray onto anyone else's property. That got to be the coolest thing about this system."

Kletke also checks historical data, and if he's had complaints about spray drift, he can check the weather details on the day he sprayed and know definitively if it's valid or not.



Guy Ash is the manager of WeatherFarm.

(WeatherFarm) also provides growing degree days and freeze severity data

But that is just the foundation on which the real meat of WeatherFarm sits. More value for farmers is provided by comprehensive decision support tools that assist in predicting the risk of occurrence of and management of fusarium, wheat midge, grasshoppers and sclerotinia. It also provides growing degree days and freeze severity data. A winter wheat survivability tool designed and sponsored by Ducks Unlimited and Western Ag Innovation is built inside WeatherFarm.

CHECK CONDITIONS ON YOUR PHONE

Chris Kletke farms at Brunkild, Manitoba. He's keen to harness the power of technology to help him make better management decisions on his farm. He's had a WeatherBug weather station

WIDE-SCALE FORECASTING

New for 2011 will be more growing degree day applications for a variety of crops, including canola, corn and soybeans, in addition to the existing applications for wheat and barley. There will also be an integrated soil moisture crop bulletin and a soil moisture outlook model.

Most recently, WeatherFarm has announced it's incorporating automated "nudging" techniques that utilize real-time weather data from its network of weather stations. This new technology is used

by the U.S. Weather Service and the U.S. Military. WeatherFarm is the first Canadian forecasting system to use it. "This will reduce errors in the short-term forecast by up to 50 per cent," says Ash. "For spring flooding forecasts, storm watches other short-term weather events, WeatherFarm will provide best forecasting available in the country."

"What's different about WeatherFarm is the scope of field-level functionality available. It's unmatched," says Ash. "The deci-

sion support tools we've designed will really help farmers with their management decisions, especially for operations like spraying. It's not that they don't have to field scout anymore by any means, but it's definitely another powerful tool in their management toolbox," he says.

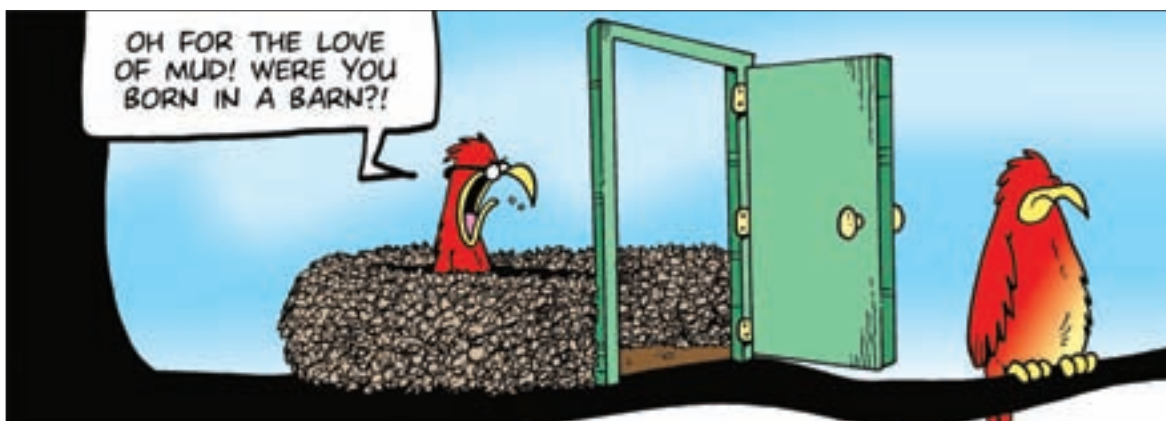
ON-FARM STATIONS

Farmers can take a step further and ensure they get the best data set possible by purchasing their

own WeatherBug monitoring station and incorporated into the existing system. The commercial retail value of a weather system is \$2,750, however, farmers can purchase the system for \$1,750. "This price includes the equipment, the technology, installation and five years of maintenance and repair," says Ash. Stations are also given away at various draws at trade shows and through the CWB.

Andrea Hilderman writes from Winnipeg, Man.

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What WeatherFarm offers

- Comprehensive free service through one portal
- Data from over 1,000 weather stations (WeatherBug & others) on the Prairies
- Data from over 8,000 weather stations globally
- Decision support models ranging from disease and insect risk prediction, to growing degree day models, to winter wheat survivability that improve on-farm management decisions
- Weather forecasting model

using the best technology platform available and building in actual surface data from the weather station integrated into the system.

- Analyze and graph/chart data in your region
- Integrated soil moisture crop bulletin with summaries of conditions in Western Canada
- Ongoing developments and improvements in field level functionality
- Live market information