“I think the best thing is that it has made me look better to my growers. DTN products have helped me look more professional. That’s a big deal.”

Dorian Gatchell

DTN Agronomic Platform increases data, reduces effort out in the field

Dorian Gatchell, CPAg, CCA
Granite Falls, Minnesota

Be it wind, rain, mud, hail, or heat, Dorian Gatchell has endured it all out in the farm fields of western Minnesota. As an agronomist, founder, and owner of Minnesota Agricultural Services, Gatchell’s passion is partnering with growers to uncover issues in their fields and create solutions that help them maximize their production.

While the elements can be trying, one thing that he does not endure is frustration with his scouting system now that he has DTN Agronomic Platform (AP). Nearly everything he wants to know about a particular field is available, in real-time, on his mobile device — saving him and his clients time and money.
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What he was up against.
In the past, Gatchell had used an array of scouting systems with varying levels of success. When he decided to search for a new scouting system, he had three primary requirements in mind.

One, he needed the ability to work off-line. His work puts him in remote fields where data connectivity is often nonexistent. He was tired of having to store field data on his computer (an issue he had with the other systems), then, after a long day in the field, having to download it, format it into a report, and send it to farmers.

Two, the system had to be simple to use. Being out in the elements all day, Gatchell just wanted some simplicity in his work.

Three, it had to have GPS tracking capabilities. Gatchell explained that GPS tracking would allow him to better manage his and his team’s progress in a field, ensuring efficient and accurate survey work.

He found all three requirements in DTN AP, a comprehensive agronomic software tool that integrates precision ag technology into a single, easy-to-use interface. It allows users to customize the available resources and hardware tools to best suit their requirements.

What we did to help.
With DTN AP, when Gatchell comes across an issue in a field — say a weed or insect — he can tag the exact GPS location, take a picture of the issue, and make detailed notes. Since the platform allows for off-line data entry, he no longer has to allow time to get back to the office and upload all the data. All he has to do is hit “synch” and the data is formatted into a report and automatically sent to the grower.

“When a customer gets the report, they can see where we were in the field,” Gatchell explained. “They can see where we were out in the field, not just where we found an issue or had an observation. That’s something I think they very much appreciate.”

To stay on top of insects, he uses DTN Z-Traps, a “smart” insect trap that traps, counts, and details insect populations throughout the fields he inspects. Z-Traps are part of a host of hardware tools available with the platform.
“It comes down to easy. If it were a normal sticky trap or pheromone trap and I had to drive to that trap once a week to go monitor it...well, the harder and less likely it is to get done,” said Gatchell. “[Z-Trap] was a very easy way to be able to keep monitoring the insects. It’s a neat technology. I’ve had some customers look at that and say ‘Wow!’ [It] makes me look like I’m on top of technology.”

With DTN AP, Gatchell provides more data to his farmers, which helps them quickly confront issues as they arise and best manage their fields. For example, if there is an insect problem, Gatchell uses the solution to analyze the best course of action. “You put in your cost of whatever commodity you’re looking at and [DTN AP] gives you a report if, OK, now this is what’s going to happen potentially if you do not treat, or if you treat,” he said. “[It’s] just another layer of information to be able to bring to the grower.”

Given that DTN AP stores all of the data he gathers, it is continuously building a history of each field. At the end of the season, Gatchell can review the historical data to look for patterns and contemplate the whys and hows.

“We can start looking at if something changed,” he said. “The grower’s environment? The field environment? Did they change something to induce one weed versus another? It is that type of data logging that’s really kind of neat.”

What the impact was.

After years of using other scouting systems, Gatchell said he has finally come upon one — DTN AP — that he will continue to use. It meets all of his needs, and he admits, there are a lot more features that he has yet to try out.

“I think the best thing is that it has made me look better to my growers,” he said. “I try to be as professional as I can in the business that I run. DTN helps me look more professional — that’s a big deal.”