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Contact:
Susan Ruland
(202) 742-5967, ext. 10
susan.ruland@AgGateway.org

AgGateway Tests Precision Ag Conversion Toolbox

Washington, D.C., May 1, 2014 – AgGateway will begin initial testing next week of its Standardized Precision Ag Data Exchange (SPADE) Conversion Toolbox. The test will take place in Lincoln, Neb., at PlugFest, an agricultural machinery compatibility testing event organized by the Agricultural Electronics Manufacturers Foundation (AEF) and hosted by the National Tractor Testing Lab. The SPADE team expects to release the completed toolbox by late summer.

The SPADE Conversion Toolbox addresses a pressing need in agriculture: interoperability, or the ability of farm systems to “talk” to each other. It is a set of software tools designed to simplify field operations data exchange by farm management software companies, farm equipment manufacturers and other stakeholders.

Farm equipment now collects vast amounts of data to capture such information as how much product was applied or crop harvested, where it was applied, and when. That information can be used to farm more accurately and efficiently – which makes better use of resources and also increases the safety of the food supply.

“The problem is that it’s often very hard for growers and their partners to get to that data, so most of it goes unused,” said Andres Ferreyra, Ph.D., Manager of Special Projects in Ag Connections, Inc., and the SPADE Management Team Lead. “Stakeholders in agriculture spend a lot of time and effort converting between multiple proprietary data formats in order to get anything done. The SPADE Conversion Toolbox will make a huge difference in breaking that data format logjam.”

“When all the equipment and software are speaking the same language, communication across the industry finally becomes possible,” said Joe Tevis, Ph.D., Director of Agronomic Products and Services for Topcon Precision Agriculture, and SPADE Project Chair.

All of the standards and formats created by AgGateway – the work of the volunteer councils and project teams such as SPADE – are open standards for all to access and use, and they can be used globally. There is no fee to access or use AgGateway standards; the industry as a whole can benefit.

Tevis noted that the SPADE team has worked closely with AEF and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) on the project. "Our AgGateway SPADE team has found the working relationship with ISO/AEF to be very satisfying and mutually beneficial," Tevis said. "The expertise of the AEF committees in machine-implement interface as well as their attention to detail is complemented by AgGateway's practical agri-business perspective."

The value of AgGateway's standards-driven effort was echoed by Dennis Daggett, Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at ProAg, and current Chair of AgGateway's Precision Ag Council.

"A comprehensive standard for data exchange will be huge for agriculture," he said. "There's often a clear before-and-after when standards emerge in agriculture – think of '3-point-hitch' or 'quick hydraulic couplers'... Standardization in these areas made life a lot easier for everyone involved."

AgGateway's effort is comprehensive, and ranges from implementation of standards in multiple segments of the industry to laying a firm foundation through a comprehensive glossary of agricultural terms and definitions.

"A glossary clearly defines the data being collected and transmitted. The AgGateway glossary is being developed in conjunction with other standards organizations and regulatory groups. This takes a little more time, but develops accuracy and credibility for what we are doing," added Daggett.

More information on AgGateway projects will be available at the AgGateway Mid-Year Meeting in Altoona, Iowa, June 9-12. For more information, go to www.AgGateway.org.

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