

Weather Central helps time spray applications

A partnership with Bayer means that the services are still free for farmers to use

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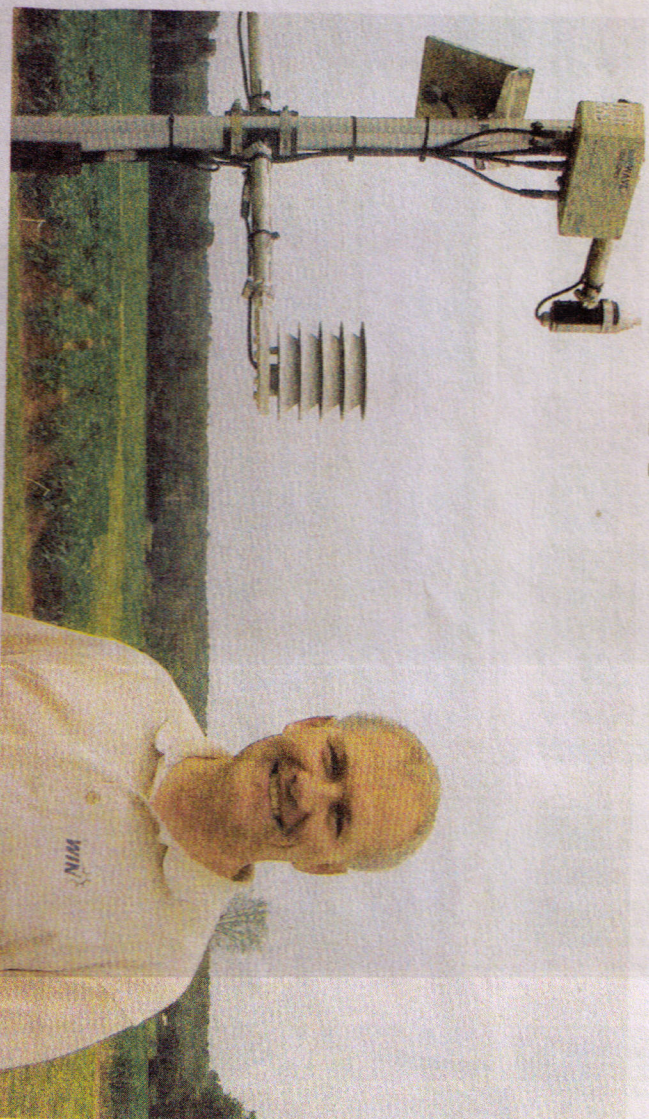
How can a weather forecast be packaged to make it useful to farmers? That's what the team at the Weather Innovations Incorporated (WIN) has done in partnership with Bayer CropScience and the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board, creating www.weathercentral.ca.

This new service will deliver useful information based on current weather forecasts that can be used to make management decisions for your wheat fields right away.

"We've put it where everybody can get to it."

— Ian Nichol

WIN provides the advisories SPRAYcast, DONcast, and WHEATcast through the Bayer program that translate raw weather forecasts into useful information. The now familiar DONcast predicts DON (deoxynivalenol) toxin levels at heading; WHEATcast helps to predict the foliar diseases powdery mildew and Septoria tritici in wheat and SPRAYcast helps with the timing of any application of sprays. All three are available free of charge on



Ian Nichol with a weather station. Weather Innovations now has 700 stations across North America

the weathercentral.ca website. When OMAFRA pulled out of the service of providing

direct advisories to producers in 2000, WIN began developing their weather models. They

started with a few weather stations and now the WIN network includes over 700 weather-monitoring locations across Canada and the United States in addition to data feeds from other networks.

It's taken a while to get the infrastructure in place but now through the program with Bayer in 2009 it's easier than ever to access some of the advisories they've developed.

"We've put it where everybody can get to it," Ian Nichol, WIN's business manager, explained to visitors to a recent

open house at the Pioneer Centre

open house at the Bayer Crop-
Science Research Farm in
Rockwood.

Nichols described SPRAYcast
as a free program that allows
farmers to access a three-day
wind conditions forecast, nar-
rowed down to four-kilometer
grids, in order to more accu-
rately identify the best spraying
times during the next three-day
window to get the least amount
of off-target movement.

WHEATcast and DONcast are
also free but you will need to sign
up to access the data. The wheat
program used to require users to
input GPS co-ordinates but Nich-
ols found that some of the wheat
fields ended up plotted in the
middle of Lake Erie.

Now with weathercentral.ca
you can simply point to your
fields on the map and the data-
base will capture the information
you need. You'll also need to put
in a bit more information, such as
the wheat variety and tillage, as
well as previous crops, the head-
ing date, and an estimate of the
foliage canopy.

As of July about 600 people
have registered for the service,
logging in over 1,000 fields.
"Even now there are 500 hits a
day, driven by SPRAYcast," said
Nichols. At its peak there were
3,000 hits a day, when farmers
were making the majority of
decisions for their wheat fields.