

Top data trends for farming in 2020

Introduction

2020 marks the start of a new decade, one in which a raft of increasingly advanced digital solutions will become available to growers. Not all of these new technologies will necessarily bring value; with so many different options on the market, the challenge will be determining which of these are not only functionally useful and valuable, but which will be relevant to the requirements of individual farmers.

The last ten years have marked a sharp uptake in adoption of data technologies in agriculture, as more and more farming businesses seize the opportunity to increase their productivity and refine their internal operations. This trajectory is set to continue. Through smart use of the right data technologies, it will become possible for farming businesses to improve their operations and improve their results – all by combining those technologies with existing knowledge, skills, and management practices. With growers facing increased demands from regulatory bodies, supply chains and consumers, to produce more whilst meeting sustainability and compliance standards, the further rollout of data technologies will represent a huge opportunity for farms looking to grow in the next decade.

Piers Costley, Managing Director of Farmplan, the leading supplier of software specifically designed for the agriculture sector, gives his thoughts on three predictions for data trends which will shape farming in 2020 and beyond.

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1 Integrating data with farming becomes second nature

There will be 20.5 billion connected smart devices across the world in 2020, according to research agency Gartner.[1] The rise of smart devices has already made a huge impact on our everyday lives in the last decade, including within the agriculture industry. From a farming perspective, devices are used to collect huge amounts of data every day, measuring such variables as soil quality, crop growth progress, or livestock health. This results in a huge amount of data being collected, but which of that data is relevant and will ultimately benefit the farm? Blindly collecting every single piece of data does not provide value in itself. What's necessary are solutions that decipher and refines that data, creating a more power and seamless experience for farm management. The next decade will see this to a much greater degree.

“Each business has their own way of tracking data. Many businesses still relying on handwritten notes, or even just their own memory! For those who have gone digital, each piece of software uses its own data architecture,” says Piers Costley. “Problems can arise due to the diverse sources of data entering that system. Most farms have the potential to use a number of different pieces of software or apps, each with their own data language. Different data formats and software architectures potentially combine to create an unworkable mess, making farming more complicated and inefficient. From 2020 onwards, we’ll see a greater emphasis placed on uniting that data and ensuring far greater efficiency and control for farms. Essentially, data will start working on behalf of growers far more than ever before.”

Greater connectivity will not just enable greater efficiency and productivity internally but will also allow farms to connect with agronomists and other supply chain partners with greater ease than ever before. We have already seen a surge in data usage and smart technology on the farm in recent years. We will now see this integration accelerate, as data is connected seamlessly between systems and businesses, ultimately unlocking greater value for farms across the UK.

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2 Greater insight will deliver greater efficiency on farms

“It’s crucial that farming business make data capture work for them, using the right systems to support their work and drive better decision-making,” says Piers Costley. “Adoption of data technologies that don’t offer greater insights on the farm means that collected data will just sit on a hard drive. The real value is unlocked when the insight can be used to support a farm’s existing skills and knowledge. For example, you could generate management reports, real-time graphs, manage stock, or instantly produce reports to demonstrate compliance. That inert data suddenly becomes a lot more mobile when combined with data solutions, instantaneously tapping previously hidden reserves of value.”

As data integration becomes more and more the norm, achieving greater awareness and insight into your farm’s own operations will too. The next few years will see a sharp rise in efficiency for those farms who have chosen to invest in advanced tech solutions.

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3 Precision farming continues to rise

Precision agriculture has seen extremely rapid growth over the last few years. Between 2018 and 2023, the global market value is expected to almost double from approximately £3.89 billion to £7.30 billion.[2]

Advocates of precision farming will see greater support for their approach, as smart data tech offers more and more functionality that can prompt noticeable results on the farm. With farming being increasingly focused on ROI (return on investment) rather than yields, the pressure is on farms to be smarter and more focused with their efforts and avoid pouring unnecessary resources into areas that ultimately don’t reward it.

“Precision agriculture relies on tools and data in order to make the best possible decisions,” says Piers Costley. “Those tools are becoming stronger and stronger each year. Precision agriculture, backed by connected data technology, has the power to deliver better results on farms across the UK.”

In Europe, around 70-80% of new farm equipment sold now includes some form of precision agriculture technology.[3] In the next decade, we’ll see data and analytics take an even stronger role in determining the most lucrative course of action on farm, and farm businesses will achieve stronger outcomes with fewer resources as a result.



Looking to the future

Many UK farms have faced great uncertainty over the last few years, whether due to political changes or shifts in a turbulent marketplace. However, there are clear trends: data will play a larger role in farming, as what is often termed the “data revolution” progresses both in the UK and abroad. The right tools can be used to supplement and enhance traditional farming; it will become possible to improve and refine your existing farming operations, without great change or upheaval.

“Although challenges are inevitable, UK farms are well positioned to seize the opportunities granted by smart data technology,” adds Piers Costley. “Growers who are seeking greater flexibility, efficiency, and profitability on their farms would do well to investigate digital solutions that can unlock a great deal of value. Whatever your size or business aims, there are options available to you. Seek out a solution that offers the clearest path for growing your business for 2020 and beyond.”

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