Now is a great time to look back and ahead to next year
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With harvest wrapping up in most areas in southwestern Ontario, now is a great time to take a look back at the year of 2017 and ahead to next year. The amount of technology available to growers today is huge and most are using some in various ways.

The thing that I notice, are the missed opportunities to extract quality information from the technology. We are missing the chance in some situations to implement and integrate the information to support decision making on the farm.

Planter monitors are a great tool, especially when it is connected with the yield data, this opens up a world of trials and experiments you can conduct on your own farm with very little effort and can have profound benefits.

Most of these can be set somewhat even before the planting season starts by putting in the varieties and hybrids that you have on order and making sure your fields are in and labeled properly. This will reduce time at planting and increase the chance of the data being recorded correctly.

Yield monitors have been around for many years and it still amazes me how much potential there is to continue to collect and capture more of it and put it to good use. When you have several years of good data we can really utilize the information by creating management zones or separating out different varieties or hybrids and see how they perform on your farm. Trials whether intentional or accidental can be extracted from the data and put to good use in your planning and decision making.

Colourful maps are only the first step in utilizing the investment in these useful tools. For years now, we have been spreading variable rate fertilizer based off of crop removal values from yield maps and soil sample values.

Always make sure you calibrate your yield monitor every year and for each crop you harvest and double check often with actual scales weights from the elevator, seed size, a wide range in yields and moisture content can change the calibration dramatically.
Aerial imagery is another great tool. It doesn’t really matter how the imagery is collected, whether it be by drone, airplane or satellite there is useful information in these images. Again, creating management areas and sometimes layering with yield data to have multiple layers of data to indicate crop performance differences and make more significant zones. Using the in-season images as a scouting guide to make a pre-call plans to target specific areas ahead of time saves time and money.

While I have listed some technology that many are currently using, the biggest hurdle I come across is lack of quality information, the old garbage in garbage out really holds true here. If your fields aren’t labeled correctly or the varieties or hybrids you’re planting aren’t labeled right, trying to evaluate the data at the end of the year can be almost impossible.

Having a yield monitor that is “out about 20 bushels” or inconsistent has little value as well. You wouldn’t accept a planter that was out 20 per cent, why would you accept a yield monitor with that much error?

One technique that helps insure quality data is to double check throughout the planting or harvest season that the data being collected is actually there and usable. Having one or two fields missing is a lot better than having your whole farms’ data not usable.

There are tools that can help with this by recording and backing the data up on the cloud in real time or on a daily basis. Then sharing or communicating with whom you work with to do a double check that things are all in order or even just putting the data on a thumb drive and checking it out periodically.

If you are done harvest and have multiple years of yield data sitting in the combine and never analyzed, or are just planning on getting into collecting your own data, we at AGRIS Co-operative and Wanstead Farmers Co-operative with our AIS System (Advanced Information Services) can help you collect and manage your data and put it to good use on your farm.