

Follow other farmers on Twitter

If you've spent any time during the past several weeks at the local gas station, feed-n-seed or neighborhood coffee shop, you know that folks are all atwitter about how the weather has delayed planting across Iowa, and the conversation doesn't stop there.

Naturally, the Internet is buzzing with articles and "tweets" about market prices, soil conditions and acres



Farm Energy

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planted. If you're interested in starting a dialogue with producers in other re-

gions or just reading their latest musings, a few minutes on Twitter can tell you what's on people's minds. You don't even need a Twitter account to start! Just go to twitter.com and search for the hashtag #plant11 to find the latest gossip on rainfall and planting progress.

If you're the type who thinks auto-steer was invented to help you safely convert your tractor into an office on

wheels, your favorite mobile device can also help you use Twitter to connect with other farmers.

You can gather opinions quickly from fellow farmers by tweeting, "Just finished planting the last 160 acres. How's it going in your neighborhood? #plant11." You can also share your own advice, and the 140-character limit keeps tweets from users clear and concise.

Learn how to use Twitter

If the idea of navigating Twitter makes you nervous, helpful online resources for farmers exist. For example, what's the deal with these hashtags? Tags such as #plant11 or #agnerd identify related tweets by category. This helps to streamline search results, so they are more organized and more relevant.

Social media beginners can learn about Twitter hashtags and other fundamentals from the new webinar series from the National Corn Growers Association at www.ncga.com/socialmedia.

Registration is free, and the videos are archived on the NCGA website to accommodate scheduling conflicts. The next event is May 19, and the series will continue through the end of this year.

Beginners and intermediate users can also find tips from the video tutorial, "Social Media for Agricultural Businesses: Twitter" from Penn State Cooperative Extension at extension.psu.edu/farm-business/farmentrepreneurs/marketing. This video offers information on Twitter lingo, profile designs, account management, and applications such as TweetDeck and TweetChat.

Like Penn State, Iowa State and other land-grant universities are also tweeting information regarding research, best practices and other university news. Digital and printed news articles still contain comprehensive details about upcoming events, but Twitter provides a platform for sharing timely information faster than ink can dry on the page.

Follow Farm Energy news

Allow me to demonstrate. Iowa Learning Farms will offer field days in counties this summer. ISU Farm Energy will be at some of those events regarding farm-related energy conservation and efficiency. Starting this month, follow me on Twitter @ISU_Farm_Energy or search for #ILFfielddays on twitter.com for the most up-to-date scheduling.

Uh-oh, all this talk about technology still brings us right back around to the weather. If soil conditions are keeping you out of the field, consider tuning in for the ISU Farm Energy spring webinar. A variety of tips for on-farm energy savings will be presented by ISU Extension ag engineers Mark Hanna and Jay Harmon. Online registration is free, so join us for a look, including fuel conservation for tractors, energy-efficient farm lighting and more.

The webinar will be live at 10 a.m. May 11. Participants will need a computer with high-speed Internet and speakers. For more information, visit farmenergy.exnet.iastate.edu.

Petersen is program coordinator for the ISU Farm Energy Initiative sponsored by the Iowa Energy Center.



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