

## CASE STUDY



# USING STANDARDIZED DATA TO SIMPLIFY 4R REPORTING

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Andrew Gladden

Luckey Farmers, Inc, Woodville, OH

### CHALLENGE

Luckey Farmers wanted to adopt proven best practices through the 4R program and become certified. Existing data capture and reporting capabilities did not provide efficient means to realize this.

### SOLUTION

Luckey Farmers decided to adopt Agworld as a co-op-wide collaborative platform on which agronomists work together with growers, applicators and samplers to capture the whole workflow of growing a crop.

### RESULT

Because all data from soil sampling, recommendations and applications get stored on Agworld in a standardized form, creating 4R audit reports is quick and easy for Luckey Farmers. In addition to the many other benefits brought to Luckey and their growers throughout their respective businesses, Agworld also provides Luckey Farmers quick agronomic and nutritional snapshots per field and an overview of which fields need to be sampled each year in order to remain 4R compliant.



## Environmental stewardship around Lake Erie

Luckey Farmers, Inc was established in 1919 and is a grain marketing and farm supply cooperative located in Northwest Ohio. Its 11 locations service over 2,000 grower-members with a wide range of services. Because of Luckey Farmers' long history and close proximity to Lake Erie, they recognized the need to join the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program and help their growers be the best possible stewards of the land. Luckey Farmers' IT Director Andrew Gladden explains: "The 4R program really goes hand-in-hand with what we are trying to achieve with our growers anyway; to get them to understand nutritional best-practices by seeing the data. It shows them that performing variable rate fertilizer applications, based on regular soil tests, prevents wasting fertilizer on land that doesn't need it and from which it will just runoff into lakes and streams. So these practices are good from an agronomic, economic and environmental perspective; everyone wins!"

The 4R program refers to using the Right Source of Nutrients at the Right Rate and Right Time in the Right Place and was created to help improve soil health and reduce fertilizer runoff. Nutrients leaving fields and entering Lake Erie via streams and tributaries can cause harmful algae blooms which negatively impact other industries in the area. The 4R approach encourages agricultural retailers, service providers and growers to adopt a science-based framework for plant nutrition management and sustained crop product, while considering specific individual farms' needs.

Mr. Gladden adds: "Some legislation has already been introduced in Ohio that prohibits growers from spreading fertilizer on frozen ground and within a certain time frame from when rainfall is expected for example. With adhering to the 4R code of practices, we take this further still by stating that fertilizer has to be incorporated within a week on fallow fields. And this is only one example; the 4R program is all about introducing best practices to retailers, co-ops and growers that make sure that we do what is best for our environment and that prevent more red-tape from being introduced by the government."

## Keeping a long-established co-op at the forefront of technology

Luckey Farmers has a long history of providing high quality service to its members and, with the introduction of digital technology rapidly advancing in agriculture, Luckey Farmers was looking at staying at the forefront of this so they could continue to provide superior quality services to their members. Mr. Gladden elaborates: "When we started to look at which digital platform we wanted to adopt across our co-op, we wanted to make sure it is one that allows us to seamlessly cooperate with our grower-members on. We felt that, whilst we obviously needed a superior digital solution for our agronomists, applicators and samplers, the connection to our grower-members would be crucial for us to ensure we kept them engaged. The Agworld platform is really the stand-out solution for us as it has a focus on keeping growers engaged with their service provider."

Most digital record keeping systems available in the US marketplace only offer their services to a very specific audience, with services tailored to either growers, retailers or applicators. The 4R program however demands an integrated approach from all service providers and the grower combined, with reporting needed across all user groups. Mr. Gladden realized this early in the process when looking at potential providers and made sure his needs were met: “In order to obtain and maintain 4R certification, we need to provide a plethora of reports every year. Luckey Farmers has to make sure that these reports do not end up costing us a lot of time and effort, as we prefer to spend our energy on our growers and help them improve their results. Agworld allows us to collect data from all different participants in the nutrient-application workflow and accurately report on it, which is exactly what we were looking for.”

Mr. Gladden continues: “The one thing we didn’t want, was the burden of spreadsheets. The 4R program doesn’t care which fertilizer products are getting used on a particular field, it just wants to know the quantity of each element applied. We need to show when a field was last sampled, what the sampling results were, which crops were grown in the meantime and what the nutrient removal of these crops was. We don’t want to have to worry about an abundance of error-prone spreadsheets and spend a lot of time figuring out the nutrient content of individual blends. Agworld products have a known nutrient make-up and when we run reports, it shows us exactly how many units of N, P, K etc. were used in a specific area; this is what Luckey Farmers needs to show for 4R reporting and that’s why our Agworld reports are extremely helpful. Agworld also shows us exactly which fields have not been sampled in the last 4 years and therefore need sampling before the next nutrient application; it’s functions like these that really make my life a lot easier.”

## Standardization and cooperation is key

In the 4R program, standardization of practices is key; from following tri-state fertilizer recommendation practices to ensuring that the runoff of nutrients from fields is minimized. Mr. Gladden adds: “Standardization is important everywhere, and data is no different. If you work with a system that allows users to freely enter data, you invariably end up with a lot of different variations of the same product, spelled differently. It might not seem like a big problem to the untrained eye but, when it comes to creating reports from this data, it certainly is. What I like about Agworld is that data on the Agworld platform is all standardized; products cannot be freely entered, and users have to choose products from a list. This means that when we create reports, our reports are accurate, and they show the exact amount of nutrients applied, as is stipulated by the 4R program.”

A big part of the 4R program is educating growers on best-practice and what they can do to be the best stewards of their land. Mr. Gladden: “Both our growers and Luckey Farmers as an organization want to make sure that we achieve the best agronomic results possible. So, we don’t want to waste fertilizer on land that doesn’t need it and we don’t want fertilizer run off into the streams and lakes. To make sure our growers understand why we make certain recommendations, we organize training sessions every year that inform them



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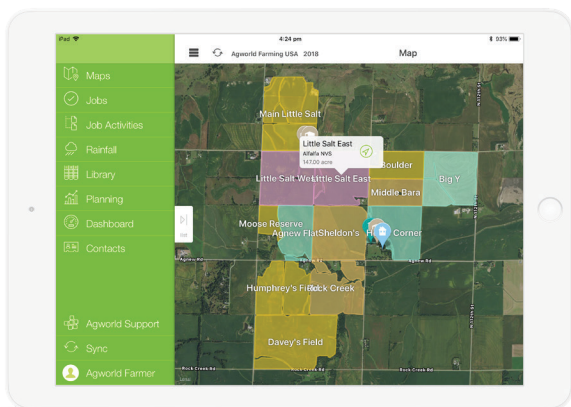




of what we are trying to achieve as a co-op by being 4R certified and how we are going to achieve this. By having our growers use Agworld in conjunction with us, they really get a good overview of what is happening on each field and why. Agworld offers our growers an immediate snapshot of all their fields and the status of each field separately, which really enhances the understanding of growers as to what our agronomist are trying to achieve together with them.”

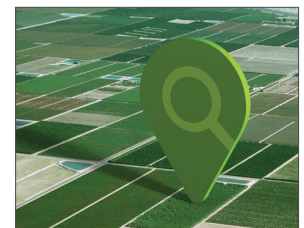
Mr. Gladden concludes with: “We want to make sure that farming around Lake Erie remains viable and Luckey Farmers, together with its members, is looking to contribute anything they can to make sure we are the best stewards of the land. For us, Agworld is making our 4R certification process a lot easier each year and the Agworld platform helps us connect to our growers on a level that allows them to be a partner in this process too. Whether it pertains to small or large growers, technologically sophisticated or more advanced operations; they are all part of the 4R process together with us and Agworld can offer all of them a strong link back to our organization.”

## IMPROVING PROFITABILITY IN AGRICULTURE




### WHAT AGWORLD OFFERS YOU:

- Collect data at every level in a structured way.
- Easily share data with anyone important to your organization.
- Un-paralleled insights into your operation.
- Empowers you to make more profitable decisions than your peers.



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