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# the **LEADER**



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## YOUR FARM. YOUR DATA?

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It's no secret that we live in an increasingly connected world. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow people to stay in touch with distant friends, family, and even celebrities. Technology giants like Apple, Amazon, and Google are constantly rolling out products and services (some of which you didn't even know you needed until you learned about them) that make it easier to shop online, read the latest news, discover the latest and greatest music, check the weather, get directions – the list goes on and on. Even something as unassuming as your grocery store rewards card allows the store to send you coupons for items you previously purchased.

Agriculture is not exempt from these changes, and for the most part the advent of precision farming technology has been a positive development. Today's farmers have access to a wealth of information about their farms that allows for things like more efficient use of inputs, lower impact on the environment, and timely intervention to manage disease. Just like all the consumer technology we discussed above, data collection in agriculture is taking off because it adds value for both farmers and consumers.

But it's not all roses – as we often see, new solutions create new problems. In this case, it is without a doubt the issue of data security and privacy. Over the

past few years it seems like there has been a data breach nearly every day, and cases of data misuse/abuse are becoming alarmingly common. And the more places your data is stored, the more vulnerable it is.

The issue of data security and privacy is not limited to new technology. Farmers are asked to share information for everything from the USDA Census of Agriculture to industry certifications. Take for instance the Good Agricultural Practices programs (GAPs) that many farmers participate in these days. GAPs are a good way for farmers to verify they are conducting best practices on their operations, and GAPs certification is a valuable way for farmers to demonstrate to consumers that the food they grow is safe, healthy, and responsibly produced. But GAPs audits collect a lot of information about your farm, and it's important that auditors respect farmers' privacy by protecting proprietary information.

“Ultimately, if the data is collected on the farm, then the data belongs to the farmer,” said NCFB President Larry Wooten. “Knowing up front who does and who could have access to your farm data is extremely



important. We wouldn't just hand over our W-2 or a tax return without knowing the intended use, so why hand over every detail of how your farm and business operates? Farmers should know how their data is being used and should demand an appropriate level of privacy.”

If you are considering implementing a new technology, program, or service on your farm, be sure to review the terms of your contract carefully. If you have existing agreements in place, consider reviewing those terms as well. Read carefully and ask questions. What type of information is being collected? Does the information leave my farm? If so, how much and how long is it retained? Where



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is it stored and how is it secured? Is it personally identifiable or just aggregated? Who has access to the information? Can it be sold without my permission? Could someone take legal action to gain access to the information? Could it be used against me?

At the end of the day, farmers have a lot to gain from data sharing and precision agriculture, but those gains should not cost them their right to privacy. North Carolina Farm Bureau is committed to protecting farmers' property rights and will continue to help guard against any unintended consequences of data sharing. And if you have a specific question or concern please do not hesitate to contact us. We are here to help you in any way we can.