

New Laws Should Give Australian Farmers More Control Over Data

Recent changes to law and governance should ultimately give Australian farmers more control over their data, according to the Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture research project.

Project Researchers Leanne Wiseman (Griffith University) and Jay Sanderson (USC) have identified a significant shift in the way data is being thought about, including draft new laws relating to data access.

"It's a great first step for farmers who have been cautious in the past about adopting new technology because of uncertainty around the collection and use of data," said Associate Professor Sanderson.

"We're beginning to address the critical issues, from who owns the data collected on farm to how we make sure that the individual farmer can access their data down the track."

Associate Professors Sanderson and Wiseman have been evaluating current rules around agricultural data as part of a broader project to develop new industry principles, policies and frameworks for data ownership, management and access.

"Farm data has become one of the most valuable things a farmer can harvest because of its ability to predict business outcomes and increase farm profits," said Associate Professor Wiseman.

"However, recent surveys suggest that concerns around protection and privacy are the biggest barrier to data sharing and therefore an impediment to adopting new technology where data is collected and used to make business decisions.

"We want to provide farmers with the information and the tools they need to confidently negotiate the issues surrounding 'big data' so they can make the most of emerging digital technology - whether its drones, robots or sensors," she said.



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- CSIRO
- DATA TO DECISIONS CRC
- Australian Farm Institute
- Griffith University
- University of the Sunshine Coast
- UNE - University of New England

This project is supported by funding from

- Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

"Data rules are complicated but there's a lot of change happening and the more you know as an individual farmer, the more chance you have of controlling, protecting and accessing your data for the future," said Associate Professor Sanderson.

"The results of our work will help farmers to understand their rights and the legal protections available so that they can make more informed decisions."

Associate Professor Wiseman said changes to contract laws, which came into effect in November, were already offering a greater level of protection to small agribusiness looking to sign up to technology-based contracts.

"New obligations around unfair contract terms for small business consumers has put greater onus on technology providers to make their terms-of-use less complex and easier to understand. Of course, this includes terms-of-use relating to data privacy, security and dissemination," she said.

"There's a golden opportunity here to ensure that future terms-of-use contracts are designed to meet the needs and concerns of farmers."

The outcomes of the Wiseman and Sanderson research will be used to develop tips and checklists for farmers as part of the Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture project.

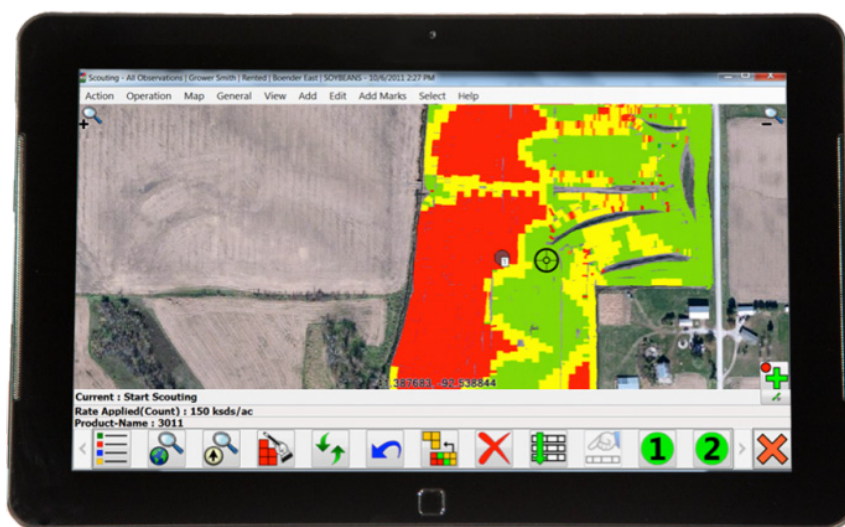
The broader project will establish the best ways to remove all current barriers to data use and strategies to aid the adoption of digital technologies to support decision agriculture, and deliver the biggest returns to the property gate.

Through the combined research activities of three universities, CSIRO Data 61, the Australian Farm Institute and the Data to Decisions CRC, the project is examining rules, systems and communication requirements, talking to farmers across all Australian agricultural industries, as well as evaluating international best practice.

Farmers are encouraged to participate in a nation-wide survey which is helping to determine specific industry and regional needs. More information can be found by visiting the Australian Farm Institute website - www.farminstitute.org.au/P2Dproject.

Led by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, this project is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Rural R&D For Profit Programme and 15 Rural Development Corporations (RDCs), contributing more than \$3.5 million over 18 months.

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