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Satellite technology makes aerial spraying easier

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP) — Farmers can thank the heavens for more than just needed rain and sun to grow their crops.

Growing use of satellite technology is helping some farmers pinpoint yield, get soil samples and determine chemical application needs.

The Satloc Corp. uses orbiting space satellites and computer programs to record the information with maps and graphs. The company displayed its wares at a harvest festival in Grand Island last week.

The company developed the satellite program in 1991 in response to lawsuits filed against aerial pesticide applicators in California, said Kevin Cobb, a Satloc sales manager from Flanagan, Ill.

Businesses and homeowners were complaining about drifting chemicals and damage to their property. The system was developed to pinpoint exactly where the chemicals were sprayed and to record the applications.

The company developed AirStar, a guidance system for crop dusters. A light bar on the front of the airplane tells applicators if they are on target, within 3 feet, with their chemical swaths.

As the plane flies up and down the field, the system monitors the location

and maps where the chemicals were applied and in what amounts.

Doug Roth, an Axtell aerial chemical applicator, has used the AirStar system for the past year. He said the system has saved him time, fuel and hours.

"It's turned a two-man operation into a one man operation," he said. No longer does he need a man on the ground flagging him as he flies overhead. AirStar costs about \$25,000.

Ground applications for the system

also were developed.

TeraStarr is a program for site-specific farming. Using the satellites, the program maps soil sample locations and other data, then analyzes how much chemical is needed in specific parts of a field. It will even control the valves of the chemical applicators, adding more or less when needed.

"The environmentalists love it. You're not using as many chemicals and have a complete record of where they are," he said.