

10-28-20

Good Morning Precision Ag Task Force Members,

With some 7.8 billion people in the world, projected to be 9.9 billion by the year 2050<sup>1</sup>, as farmers and ranchers we have many mouths to feed. At the same time, we face increased operational challenges, whether it be extreme weather events like the derecho that traveled from South Dakota to Ohio causing some 7.5 billion dollars in damage<sup>2</sup>, or the labor shortages and market disruptions caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. Then, couple this with the perhaps not well appreciated statistic that many farms are supported by off farm income. We struggle in my own county to identify farmers where this is not the case.

Precision Agriculture offers the opportunity to address these challenges through increased yields, increased capability, and increased flexibility. At the same time, it improves our farmers' economic viability while reducing environmental impact.

As I have studied this sector by being part of the Connectivity Demand working group, I have come to the opinion that Precision Agriculture is being held back. We gather today of course, because of the widely known and acknowledged disparity of broadband accessibility across the United States. My interest in this issue in my home state of Pennsylvania is part of the reason I am here. Certainly, we can all agree that poor Internet service is a gating factor. There is more though.

There are so many talented agriculturists, scientists, and engineers working in Precision Agriculture, private industry, land grant universities, start-up ventures, etc. I am amazed at what I have learned about what is possible. Unfortunately, what seems to be lacking is overall coordination across all entities. Everyone is rowing awfully hard, but the Precision Agriculture boat would move faster if the oars dipped into the water at the same time. What Precision Agriculture needs is coordination and funding at a scale seldom seen in modern times, a Manhattan Project level effort. This is a charter that extends well beyond what was envisioned for our group, but I believe it essential, and that it must be spoken.

Humanity itself depends on us getting Precision Agriculture right. The lives of millions, if not billions, are at stake.

Andy Bater

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prb.org/2020-world-population-data-sheet/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events/US/1980-2020>