The Status of Information-Based Agrichemical Management Services in Wisconsin’s Agrichemical Supply Industry

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As suppliers of crop inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides, agrichemical dealers are important components of contemporary crop production systems. While often not acknowledged, dealers also provide a significant amount of input related information to their customers. The private agribusiness sector, and local dealers in particular, play a critical role with respect to the information transfer function in farming systems (Ford & Babb, 1985). Current developments in this industry indicate that dealers will play an increasingly important role as cropping systems become more site specific through more intense use of information.

Site specific agriculture is defined here as a process of enhancing the correlation between variance in agroecological parameters with variance in management as pursued in a defined socioeconomic setting. The benefits of site specific agriculture will accrue to farmers through more efficient resource allocation, to society through pollution prevention, and to agribusinesses through marketing of analytic procedures, technological hardware, and management tools associated with site specific agriculture.

Intense informational requirements are one of the defining features of site specific agriculture. The analytic procedures, technological hardware, and management tools often associated with site specific agriculture are dependent on increasingly large and complex information streams that must be managed in a systematic fashion. In order to practice site specific agriculture, farmers will have to develop their own informational capabilities or contract with someone else to provide this knowledge and service. The cumulative outcome of this process represents an important topic of further research with respect to the structure of agriculture, the nature of farmer–agribusiness relations, and role of the farmer in agriculture. Nowak et al. in this volume address farmers’ ability to fill their own informational requirements with respect to site specific agriculture. In this paper the focus is on the participation of agrichemical supply firms in supporting farmers’ practice of site specific agriculture.