When it comes to the nomenclature used to identify the fields on a farm, the name could be very important in making sure everyone is on the same page when it comes to field applications, legal papers, and crop insurance. Farmers, fertilizer sales people, insurance agents, and consultants all need to have a precise understanding of what plot or tract of land is being referred to as farm activities are being discussed.

We recently worked with a situation where the same field had multiple names that changed each year and sometimes in the same year. As a result, several hours were spent confirming each operation was actually on the specific fields.

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) uses farm and tract numbers for all of their paperwork, which is good as long as the same farmer is operating the land. The Public Land Survey System commonly used in the U.S. Midwest and West keeps the same unique identification to a tract of land indefinitely but does not work for lands surveyed by Metes and Bounds, common to older states and Texas.

GPS coordinates are excellent when the center or specific corner is identified but require working knowledge of a latitude and longitude location system. Certainly when one has the specific coordinates, maps can be located on Google Earth or on any number of mapping programs.

Consistency is the most important issue so that everyone is on the same page. Making a notebook or folder containing all fields of a farm, including FSA aerial photos or even township plot maps, helps greatly in reducing field confusion. The time spent organizing field locations can be well spent if it avoids a chemical misapplication.

If consistent names are programmed into the planting and combine monitors so that all maps are the same, it reduces confusion greatly. GPS coordinates are so easy to use nowadays that I think they are the most applicable of identification methods. If you are not comfortable with GPS, find one that works for your operation, and keep with it, avoiding colloquial names such as “Smith 80” or Dad’s” that only mean something to a few community or family members. If at all possible, provide photo maps for each field to vendors.