

New app keeps ag producers in the know

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LINCOLN—A new University of Nebraska-Lincoln smartphone app helps agricultural producers track key temperatures.

The Climate App publishes maps that show recent highs, lows, and soil temperatures. The High Plains Regional Climate Center in UNL's School of Natural Resources released the app to keep agricultural producers aware of the temperature ranges that could affect production timelines.

Ken Hubbard, a regional research climatologist and the coordinator heading the app's development, said that the project aims to inform producers' decision-making.

"We already had maps online," said Hubbard. "But we realized that producers don't really have time to go hunting on their computers for information. So the hope is that the app will go with them on their phones and make their jobs easier."

The Climate App's homepage currently presents five options: "Maximum Temperature (F) yesterday," "Minimum Temperature (F) yesterday," "7 Day Average Soil Temperature (4")," "1 Day Soil Temperature (4")," and "1 Day Precipitation Total." Each option links to a map with a color scale that indicates the corresponding local information.

"The maps are scalable to help people find their location," Hubbard said.

The current map options focus on temperature because the HPRCC wants to help farmers decide whether it is a good time to plant. In the coming months, the app will progress to showcase precipitation information and corn water-use for the previous day. The intention is that this information would help farmers know whether to irrigate.

Sixty- seven weather stations report data to the HPRCC. Using this data, Hubbard and the team at HPRCC create maps that showcase the variations in temperature at a local level.

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The Climate App is the latest development in the HPRCC's mission to provide useful information to help producers make decisions regarding their production timelines and procedures. The app automatically imports data from the HPRCC's established system.

"The main challenge we faced in developing the app was getting the right people with the right knowledge together," said Hubbard.

For this reason, the HPRCC partnered with representatives from other groups, including UNL's Information Services, UNL's Agronomy and Horticulture department, and financial sponsors at Kansas State University. Additionally, UNL extension personnel provided invaluable feedback as the team developed prototype apps.

"The developers are on the research side," said Hubbard, "but the extension educators are the ones who talk to people who use the app. They've been providing information about how the app actually gets used."

Those interested in the app can use the phone's browser and enter the URL as hprcc3.unl.edu/Ap. There is no cost for the app. Hubbard and the app's team welcome feedback regarding the Climate App's function and future.

Hubbard can be reached at khubbard1@unl.edu.