STREAMLINING A THRIVING FAMILY OPERATION

CHALLENGE

Junior Loza was using Excel to keep track of his field applications and costs but was not able to easily run reports or identify his agronomic costs per field, variety or acre. Junior also did not have a tool to help him manage his workforce, up to 40 people in peak season, and ensure that everyone was involved in recording all of the job details.

SOLUTION

One of Junior’s agronomists was using Agworld and signed him up for a subscription back in 2017 so that he could send his recommendations straight to Junior in Agworld. Once Junior realized the potential of Agworld, he upgraded his subscription and started to fully integrate Agworld in his operation.

RESULT

By utilizing Agworld, Junior now has one platform to streamline all communications with his employees and can be sure that they always receive complete and correct job information. Loza Farms now also possesses detailed records of the inputs they have used so they can easily find their costs per input group, acre or variety.

"I get the recommendations from my agronomists through Agworld and I provide the work orders to our workers utilizing the Agworld app as well, which really takes eight or nine steps and turns it into just one step, which has streamlined our business so much!"

Leon ‘Junior’ Loza
Loza Farms, Wapato, WA
Working hard

Working hard is ingrained in the Loza family and their 600-acre farm is clear proof that working hard still pays off. Leon Loza came to Yakima Valley from Mexico in 1976 and started working on a local hops farm. After meeting his wife Mimi, becoming a US citizen and starting a family together, Leon started to rent his own land in 1992 to grow hay and sell it to other farmers. After many struggles and working hard every day, the Loza family was finally able to buy their own farm in 2006. The Loza Farm, believed to be the only Hispanic-owned hops farm in the US, has rapidly expanded every year since and now comprises 600 acres of which 300 are used to grow hops on and the other 300 acres to grow hay and raise cattle. The Loza Farm is truly a family affair for Leon and Mimi Loza with son Leon ‘Junior’ managing the day to day hops operations, his brother Michael managing the hay and cattle operations and sisters Claudia and Veronica in charge of payroll, bookkeeping and other administrative duties. Of course, during the heat of hops harvest, it’s all hands on deck all day until the job is done.

Cultivating hops is hard work and a process that still requires a lot of manual labor. Leon ‘Junior’ Loza explains: “With hops, everything just happens really fast. We have to start training the hop bines around the horizontal strings on May 5th, we usually start picking around August 20th and finish before the end of September. So, it is a real short season and we have to make sure we do everything just right. We only employ around 10 people year-round and up to 40 in peak season, so it really is a busy and stressful period for us. But this is also where Agworld really helps us out with making sure everything runs smoothly. When the hops are growing in that 3-month period and we need to spray or fertigate or do anything else in the field, we communicate this to our people through Agworld, so we are sure that they have access to correct and complete information when doing a job.”

Hops, a specialized crop

Growing hops is unlike any other crop, from planting through to harvesting. The hop varieties that are grown get decided on a supply and demand basis by the brokers and the end users, often resulting in farms growing lots of different varieties. Loza Farms for example grows over 10 different varieties,
with some fields as small as 7 acres for the niche varieties. Cascades used to be the largest variety grown on Loza Farms, but it has been overtaken by Citra and Mount Hood in recent years. Growing so many different varieties presents obvious challenges says Junior: “All these different varieties have different needs and during the growing season they often need different treatments. We have a very strict regimen of soil testing outside the growing season, with leaf and petiole testing done every week during the growing season. Based on the results of these tests, we can either apply foliar sprays of chemicals and fertilizers or fertigate and fumigate through the drip lines that irrigate our hops fields.”

Because of all these different varieties, it is important to Junior to track the exact costs per field and variety so that he knows exactly what gets spent on fertilizers and chemicals. Junior: “The more I started to use Agworld, the more I noticed new features and the more goals I was able to achieve with it – a snowball effect really. It became especially good once my other agronomists also started to use Agworld so that we are now all on the same page. I now get the recommendations from my agronomists through Agworld and I provide the work orders to our workers utilizing the Agworld app as well, which really takes eight or nine steps and turns it into just one step, which has streamlined our business so much. I can now also look at our records wherever I am, I always have them at my fingertips. I don’t have to sit behind my computer anymore and look at spreadsheets, which saves me a lot of time.”

Service is key

Junior continues: “A lot of the hops we grow are proprietary varieties that we get contracted to grow by brokers, who we tend to sell 95% of our harvest to. Of course, we want to make sure that we grow the best quality hops we can for them, so we can service our contracts and clients as well as possible. When brokers or brewers come to us and offer us contracts, that is really the best feedback we can get from our clients and it shows that we are doing the right thing.”

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“Service is really important to me, I even switched one of our agronomists last year as he wasn’t using Agworld – I really need them to provide excellent service to us so we can do the same to our clients, so I need them to use Agworld, it’s as simple as that. And one of the reasons why I use Agworld is again because they provide an excellent service. I remember the first time I started using Agworld, I submitted a question online and Ryan, one of Agworld’s team members, got back to me within 10 minutes – that really was a pleasant surprise. And still now, whenever I need to know something, the support staff at Agworld goes above and beyond to make sure that my needs are taken care of, which is crucial to me for any supplier that I work with.”

Junior concludes with: “Using Agworld as my farm management platform has been great, it is so much faster and easier than what I was used to with other software. That, in combination with great customer service, cannot be beat in my opinion. I look forward to using Agworld even more in future, with entering yields and creating a total farm performance report for example; once I am able to compare varieties and seasons, Loza Farms will be able to take another step forward no doubt!”

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