EMERALD FARMS • MAXWELL, CA

CASE STUDY

CENTRALIZED DATA IMPROVES PROFITABILITY

CHALLENGE
Emerald Farms partner and general manager Leon Etchepare was struggling to keep track of all the information and tasks that were being performed on his farm in Maxwell, CA. As he was trying to achieve more vertical integration of his farming operation, he knew that he needed a centralized platform that would deliver him the information he needed, when he needed it.

SOLUTION
Leon discovered Agworld’s capabilities in 2014 and, after comparison with many other farm management solutions, decided to implement Agworld into his operation.

RESULT
By adopting Agworld, Leon has managed to get all stakeholders involved in Emerald Farms to seamlessly communicate on the same platform. By having all data from these stakeholders available on the Agworld platform, Leon has access to more historical information which ensures that he can make better and more profitable decisions.

“When it comes to communication and ease of use, Agworld nails it.”
Leon Etchepare
Emerald Farms, Maxwell, CA
Creating data-driven change

Leon Etchepare is a fourth-generation farmer in Maxwell, Northern California. After having run his own outdoor living company for a number of years, Leon decided to come back and take over the family farm back in 2011 when his father was starting to look at retirement. This family farm, known as Emerald Farms, comprises 3,500 acres of almond and walnut trees as well as 2,500 acres of irrigated row-cropping. After transitioning into the role of partner and general manager of Emerald Farms, Leon decided that the operation needed more technology in order to become more efficient.

Leon elaborates: “We started to introduce new technologies like vehicle GPS tracking and cameras around the farm a few years after I took over the management of Emerald farms. I did get some resistance in the beginning, but as soon as people started to realize that it actually helped everybody stay honest and do a better job, they became more positive about these changes. I’ve been trying to make all new technology on my farm work together since 2013 and as part of that we started to use Agworld in 2014.”

“We first started with tracking our chemical inputs in Agworld, then the fertilizers got added and now we use Agworld for pretty much everything we do! My best use of Agworld now personally is to keep track of tasks being performed on the farm and the recommendations that are being written. With Agworld I can go back and know exactly when something got sprayed or when an irrigation happened for example. But, I can also see who did what, which helps me track down mistakes so I can discuss them with persons involved. So, although I’m not boots on the ground everyday anymore, it feels that with Agworld I can still have a similar level of control as if I was in the field every day.”
Collaboration with PCA's

Emerald Farms purchases their chemicals and fertilizers exclusively from locally based Colusa County Farm Supplies (CCFS), whose PCA's also work with Emerald Farms. Jim Pingrey is one of CCFS's PCA's and, as part of his duties, Jim oversees the agronomy of Emerald Farms' almond and walnut orchards; Jim also communicates with Leon and other foremen and overseers on Emerald Farms through Agworld. Jim explains the process as follows: "I'll write up a recommendation, Leon converts it to a work order and then sends it to the guys that are going to execute on the work order."

"These guys then create the actual record in Agworld, which works out great because I know exactly when everything’s getting completed. To put that in contrast with some of my other grower-clients that don’t use Agworld: I’m constantly trying to get them to communicate which takes a lot of effort and time in phone calls from everyone involved. With Emerald Farms, Leon and I know what’s happening at all times; Leon sees Agworld notifications when there’s work to be done, he then reviews it and turns it into a work order to get the ball rolling. The biggest advantage for me is that I can have a look on Agworld whenever I need to and see what has been done already and what still needs to be done."

Jim continues: "This is where I see the biggest strength of both grower and PCA using Agworld: information flows back and forth uninterrupted, resulting in time savings and less errors all around. It is easy for separate data silos to exist in Agriculture; being able to get rid of them by using Agworld creates synergies for everyone involved."

Vertically integrated walnut production

Emerald Farms doesn’t only grow nuts and other crops, they are also vertically integrated by selling walnut butter under their own brand, called Wellnut Farms™. Leon realized early that with an ever-increasing walnut acreage in the US, value-adding through vertical integration would be paramount to the long-term profitability of Emerald Farms. Leon explains: "We started off by making the walnut butter with a co-packer and now we’re building our own production line. The plan is to also build a sheller and cold storage so we can perform the process, from growing the walnuts to creating the butter, in-house."

"Of course, being vertically integrated does make the whole operation a lot more complex, so it is very important to keep focused on the small details, which is my job. I’m a huge data person and Agworld really helps me get the data I need. As with all systems however, we all have to make sure that we’re inputting accurate data as our reports are no good to me if they’re not accurate. It’s a huge positive for me that I can track who has done what in Agworld in order to ensure that everyone is as accurate as possible with all data inputs."

Moving Forward

For Leon and the team at Emerald Farms, every decision they take today is taken with the future of the farm and its people in mind: “I am passionate about
keeping the walnut industry alive and profitable for all involved and so I’ll do whatever I can to ensure that we introduce those technologies and marketing techniques that can help us achieve our goals and objectives. We have a value-added income stream with the walnut butter at Emerald farms, but having a stable price for the basic product is still vital for us and all other growers.”

Leon concludes with: “I definitely recommend Agworld to other growers. Agworld brings all the people together on one platform with communication and field data. You’ve got scouts, agronomists, growers, supervisors, foremen, employees all together in one application and that is hard to do. When it comes to communication and ease of use, Agworld nails it.’