



In the Field

THE FIELD IS HIS CLASSROOM

Once a teacher, always a teacher. At least that's how it is for Jonathon McCollum, who began by teaching biology and coaching football and now trains adjusters to handle claims in Minnesota. "I started as a part-time adjuster during the summers in 1995," Jonathon recalls. "It fit in nicely with my teaching career. I worked for a number of companies over the years, and in 2009 decided to make it a full-time job. I came to ProAg® the next year."

Jonathon puts the love of agriculture he's had since growing up in rural northwestern Minnesota and the knowledge he's gained in 18 years as an adjuster to work as a claims supervisor. There are a number of aspects to his job, from coordinating communication between agents, adjusters, and insureds to addressing issues that may arise with claims. Not surprisingly, his favorite part of the job is training adjusters.

"That's probably my strength, work claims and training people, because I'm still a teacher—and a coach—at heart," he states.

Because of his Minnesota location, Jonathon will also work claims in North and South Dakota, an area he's quite familiar with. "I started out working claims in the Red River Valley, and if you can work there, you can work anywhere because of the diversity of crops you'll deal with. That's where my biology background really pays off."

Doing it right

When asked what it takes to do his job well, Jonathon began with "You have to be a communicator," which is not a problem for this former FFA officer. "When I'm in a tough situation, it's not

much different than motivating a kid on doing something when you're coaching—something he's not sure he wants to do or is able to do. You also need knowledge of the business and the skill that may be most overlooked, you have to be a people person.

"Ultimately, you have to develop a relationship and earn trust," he continues. "If a producer or an adjuster trusts you, that's 90% of the battle. The only difference between us and every other insurance company is our people. In Minnesota, we've grown substantially the past few years, and it's because we have great people."

Jonathon believes that you create relationships with adjusters and earn their trust by working in the trenches with them. "I believe supervisors have to be boots-in-the-mud with their adjusters," he stresses. "The best supervisors I ever had did that. If you're not actively working in the situations your people are working in, you lose touch in a hurry."

He adds that flexibility is also an important key to success in the crop insurance business. "Last year we were talking about how to handle the drought, and this year we have acres that never go unplanted, go unplanted due to too much rain," Jonathon laughs. "You have to be adaptable and able to change gears in a hurry. That's really no different from teaching junior high."

While he's taken the best parts of his former calling and applied them to his new career, it's the differences between the two that he most enjoys.

"I came from a very structured setting, where it was bell to bell to bell," he summarizes. "Here, you work until you get it done. The flexibility and the people I work with and work for—that's what I love. It's been that way since I came on in 2010. We have respect for one another, because we know we will do what we say we will do. And it's nice to know that if I have a question for Mike Connealy, the president of ProAg, I can shoot him an email and he will shoot one back to me. You can't do that everywhere." 🌱



THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF AGRICULTURAL RISK MANAGEMENT®

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PROAGWORKS!

Where We've Come in Our First Year and What's Ahead

With a full year of experience under our belt, how well is the ProAgWorks® policy processing system performing? Actually, that's a question we ask every day.

"One thing that virtually everyone associated with the system agrees on is the fact that this system is a significant step forward," states Missy Waters, senior vice president of marketing and service. "We've gained new business and had other agents increase their book of business with us in part because of ProAgWorks. At the same time, we realize that while we have a good system, there's still a lot of room for growth."

If you compare the implementation of a new processing system to a construction project, the first year has been spent building a strong, functional foundation and framing in the building. Now comes the finishing and fine tuning, which is really an ongoing process.

"We are constantly adding enhancements to the system, based on input from our agents and our own experiences working with the ProAgWorks system," Missy adds. "One of those improvements that will help get checks into farmers' hands more quickly is ProAgFieldWorks. Being able to work that claim in the field and electronically transmit the data is going to really increase efficiency."

Data transition, integrity positive

Like any major transition of this type, there have been growing pains in the first year of ProAgWorks. "This has been



a growing year," says Terri Sell, vice president of operations. "But the problems have been minimal, and we've had some major successes. We had a good transition of the data from the old system into the new. One of the biggest positives is that data integrity and stability is so much better with ProAgWorks."

Larry Turner, owner of CIS (Crop Insurance Solutions) in Dumas, TX, agrees. "With the previous system, I was never certain that data I entered would stick," he states. "I don't have that concern with ProAgWorks. I'm very comfortable with it." (For more feedback on ProAgWorks from Larry and other agents, visit our website, www.proag.com, and read the story *ProAgWorks—The Agents' View* in the Latest News section).

"The message that I keep hearing from underwriters and agents is that ProAgWorks is so much better, but we need to keep refining," Terri says. "One of the things we believe will be very important in that process is to put together a processing agent advisory group. We want to hear from them the things that would make their day-to-day operation easier and help them grow as an agency. And those won't be the same for every agency."

The road ahead

As ProAgWorks evolves, what improvements can be expected in the near term? "Our focus going forward will be on performance and ease of use," states German Mendoza, senior vice president of information technology. Significant improvements are currently in process and others will be made on an ongoing basis."

Among those improvements already in development are:

- Batch scanning of forms, enabling them to be easily attached to the appropriate policies, is very near.
- Creation of new data collection forms that parallel data entry fields more closely.
- The ability for agents to access CIMS data on a particular customer.
- The Policyholder Tracking System, which will allow agents to move business from one AIP to another and pull the history with it.
- Integration of mapping functionality into the ProAgWorks system.

To keep everyone on the same page and increase the efficiency of the development process, ProAg created a Vendor Management Office. "We have set up a team to handle communication with the various vendors working on ProAgWorks so our efforts are coordinated. That way, we're all headed in the same direction."

It's been a good first year for ProAgWorks, and while everyone is pleased with what has been accomplished, no one is satisfied.

"We all want ProAgWorks to do everything we want it to do, and we want it today," Missy summarizes. "It is a process, and the waiting is the hardest part. We're all working to keep the waiting to a minimum." 🌱

GOING MOBILE

The migration of technology from something you house in a big box under your desk to a tool you can keep in your pocket is transforming the world of business, and the crop insurance industry is no exception. That's why ProAg® introduced ProAgFieldWorks in January of this year.

"ProAgFieldWorks is our tablet-based adjuster system," explains ProAg claims and compliance training manager Jamie Hageman. "Information can be downloaded in the field from ProAgWorks, and the adjuster can do appraisals and accounts for production to help determine the loss payable. We can also capture digital signatures, which can shorten the process by a full day. That information can then be pushed immediately back up to ProAgWorks, so both the agents and the claim processors can access it within seconds of the form being completed in the field."

The best feature of the system is its connectivity, but claims system support analyst Matt King notes that ProAgFieldWorks also gets the job done when reception is limited or nonexistent. "Whether you're connected or not, your ability to work through the process on your tablet is the same," he explains. "If you don't have a connection, you can get all the information and a signature and then upload it when you can connect."



Make it and break it

Roughly 300 tablets loaded with ProAgFieldWorks are currently in the field, working cotton and winter wheat claims.

In addition to getting adjusters trained on ProAgFieldWorks and releasing software updates to the field, Jamie and others also focus on breaking the system. "We have a number of testing environments where we work to make the system fail," he says. "By exposing issues before they show up in the field, we deliver a better system to our adjusters."

As with any new system, there have been a few issues to work out. "We're addressing those issues, as well as responding to the adjusters' suggestions about how to make the application work more smoothly for them," Jamie notes.

Matt notes that they're always working to improve the system. "We're already working on adding more supported crops to ProAgFieldWorks," he says. "Down the road, we would love to see integration with mapping software so maps are available in the field. We'd also like to see the incorporation of a notification function to let the farmer know when his claim has been submitted. We always want to make the system more user and client friendly."

"Our goal is to have the fastest, most accurate claims service possible," Jamie summarizes, "and ProAgFieldWorks is a positive step in that direction." 🌾

CLAIMS HANDLING: THE HEARTBEAT OF PROAG®

By Rob Young, National Claims Manager

Perhaps more than any other single factor, our strength in the field and ability to get claims adjusted, processed, and paid quickly is what sets ProAg® apart from other crop insurance providers. That was once again the case during the 2012-13 production season. This year we're facing the dual challenges of continued heat and drought in the Southwest and planting issues in the Corn Belt caused by a cold, wet spring.

This year, to further speed our response, we've equipped 300 ProAg adjusters with tablet computers and ProAgFieldWorks. You can read about this new program in more detail above. It's a great timesaver, and we've already had success using the program to process cotton claims this spring.

Our new technology is a great tool, but there are also some basic

processes that will help our claim-handling efficiency. We're already processing prevented planting claims—many in areas of the country unaccustomed to dealing with them. There is a helpful Q&A brochure about prevented planting on our website in the Agent Toolbox that could serve as a good resource for you as you encounter prevented planting situations. We've placed a number of other helpful documents and tools in the toolbox as well.

Apart from that, I just want to reinforce how important the fundamentals of timely loss and acreage reporting are. The sooner we receive the information, the sooner we can begin working the claim, and the faster your insureds will receive their checks. We're here to help, so take a look at the tools we've provided and contact us with any further questions. 🌾



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A MISSION TO HELP OTHERS GROW

BY DIANE STINSON, DES MOINES REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

As the relatively new regional vice president for the Des Moines region, I want to take a couple of lines to introduce myself. I've been part of the crop insurance industry for 25 years, and during that time have had the chance to work as a claims processor, a software training specialist, an underwriting and claims supervisor, and a ProAg® regional marketing manager. That's given me a pretty good picture of how everything works together.



One of the strengths I bring to this new role is a career-long focus on mentoring employees. I get my greatest sense of accomplishment when I see my team members succeed and advance in their careers. That's one of the reasons I serve on the Women in Agribusiness National Advisory Board. It's a great opportunity to contribute to women's participation and growth in the field of agriculture.

Naturally, I also have some goals for our organization. I'm always looking to increase our business. I want to make sure we are thoroughly training the field representatives and the underwriting staff. And really, the bottom line is that I want to make sure everyone in the Des Moines/Twin Cities region has the tools they need to succeed.

The past two years have tested our region, swing-

ing from extreme drought to excess precipitation—all while transitioning to the ProAgWorks® system. Our staff has done a very good job handling the claims and the transition.

We worked to provide sufficient training on the new system to both agents and internal staff, and I believe the first year has gone quite well. While we may be tempted to think that a new system will solve all the world's problems, we have to remember that it is software, and there will always be some pain in the change. The issues related to moving data from one system to another weren't huge, and they weren't global, but they were important to those whom they affected.

Our underwriters were fantastic, rallying together and doing what needed to be done to address the issues that arose and serve our insureds. That's the kind of team environment we want to continue as we move forward.

We've created a roadmap for our region, and I'm excited about where we're headed. We're in the process of filling the few gaps that remain on our team and are consolidating the Anoka and Eagan offices in a new Maple Grove office, with a move-in target of August. That will improve communication and increase efficiency.

Our goal remains the same—to deliver the highest possible level of customer service. I believe we have the pieces in place to do just that. 

