

**UTILITY OF THE APPLE MESSAGEPAD™ PDA
FOR NOTE TAKING IN THE FIELD**

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Abstract

The collection of data in the field is important aspect of all agricultural field experiments. It is also fraught with problems and perils: cumbersome note taking equipment, inefficiency and transcription errors when it is brought back to the office for analysis, to name a few. The utility of electronic devices such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to ameliorate these problems is gaining increased attention. While numerous options exist, we specifically have been evaluating the use of an Apple MessagePad™ (Apple Computer, Inc.) for routine note taking in the field. The MessagePad differs from most competing platforms in that it can utilize handwriting recognition for data entry. The use of a stylus versus the need to use keystrokes to enter data is more natural and more closely approximates the freedom that traditional paper based field notebooks allow. Small (4" x 8") and lightweight (1 lb.), the MessagePad can easily store information on all of our experiments across multiple locations. It has withstood continuous Summer use in the field by multiple operators. We also make use of a software database program, FilePad™ (HealthCare Communications), to quickly develop data entry forms that make extensive use of check boxes and pop-up lists to reduce note taking errors. This has proven to be an asset when multiple individuals have been required to take notes. The ability to upload and download data to an office computer (Windows™ or Macintosh™ based) electronically, eliminates potential transcription errors. We plan to continue our evaluation of devices such as the MessagePad and to more fully integrate it into our data collection activities. The utility of electronic data collection devices we feel has a promising future.