



ENERGY CO-OP SAVES TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS A YEAR WITH UScellular® PROPANE SOLUTION

Remote tank level monitoring also makes it easy for company to deliver excellent customer service and increase efficiency.

Customer Profile



BUSINESS TYPE:

Allied Cooperative provides agricultural products. Its energy division services 11,000 propane tanks for residents and businesses and has 25 full-time employees.

LOCATION:

Adams, in south central Wisconsin

CHALLENGES:

- Poor reception on other vendors' monitors
- Bad customer service
- Expensive
- Difficult to install

UScellular SOLUTIONS:

- **Otodata propane tank monitoring**

RESULTS SINCE LAUNCH:

- Saving tens of thousands of dollars per year
- Excellent reception, even in rural areas
- Notifications on customized app
- Reduced zero-fill truck rolls and driver time

Allied Cooperative was already using fleet management with UScellular® when it was approached by Mindy Nelson, UScellular solutions sales executive, to talk about propane tank monitoring.

Nelson knew that Allied’s energy division was not happy with one of its current suppliers and was paying too much to the second vendor. So, Nelson introduced Justin Smith, Allied energy operations and sales representative, to Otodata. “Being able to listen to Mindy and hear her idea was awesome,” Smith said.

He knew that Allied had to progress in the market to better serve its customers. “We saw that we had to adapt. You can say that our scheduled delivery program is 100%, but the goal is to have it remote monitored. That’s the only real option to know where that tank is at all times.”

Smith also said he wanted to ensure excellent customer service even amid driver and potential labor shortages.

Otodata Propane Tank Monitoring

UScellular’s exclusive propane tank monitoring solution, Otodata allows businesses to manage tank monitors remotely using a free, customizable portal in which you can set notifications per tank monitor. These include for low and critical-low alarms, fill and rapid-draw detection, view current inventory levels and sort by priority. Other advantages:

- Reduced operational expenses and increased efficiency
- Unlimited reports and alerts
- Industry-leading battery life of 15+ years
- Compatibility with all tanks and software
- Quick and easy installation
- GPS positioning of all tanks—viewable on a single map

Allied had been using two other vendors to monitor propane tanks but one of them did not function as hoped. “Their customer service wasn’t there the way it should have been and their longevity of battery life for their monitors was very slim. We were spending way too much money and energy to change out the monitors and the batteries,” Smith said. He emphasized that the second vendor provided very good service, but its monitors cost as much as \$1.25 more per month. When you consider thousands of monitors, that small amount adds up.



“Everything just boils down to the cost per mile, so the fewer miles we have to put on a route, the better it is for us. We’re not going to the tank too early.”

— **Justin Smith,**
Allied Cooperative



Serving a customer is easy with Otodata automation.



With Otodata and UScellular, truck rolls are reduced.

“The best part about Otodata is that it integrates straight into our routing software. And even if it’s not routed, we can still see if a tank is low and if we’re in that area, we can at least get that topped off. This helps with efficiency, price and the cost of delivering the fuel.”

— **Justin Smith**

Bad Reception

Smith also said that reception with his two previous vendors was low in many of his customers’ remote areas. “One vendor would require us to use a satellite monitor (instead of cellular) in the low-reception areas. But the other—if it didn’t have 50% coverage or better, it would not pick up a signal and wouldn’t send anything,” he said, adding that Otodata powered by the UScellular network provides constant, reliable service.

The Otodata monitor uses a larger antenna powered by a lower frequency UScellular network to cut through heavily wooded areas and provides an industry-leading longer battery life.

Smith had the first Otodata monitors installed in September 2022 and was immediately impressed by the service, including order fulfillment in a couple days instead of weeks or longer. Among many other attributes, he also singled out the ability to order a custom interface tailored to Allied and created free for his company. His customers can download the professional-looking app and use it to order propane and check their bill.

But he has many other good things to say.

“The best part about Otodata is that it integrates straight into our routing software. And even if it’s not routed, we can still see if a tank is low and if we’re in that area, we can at least get that topped off. This helps with efficiency, price and the cost of delivering the fuel,” Smith said.

Improved Customer Satisfaction

Customer implementation is simple. They are sent an email containing a link where they can easily download the Otodata app. “The customers really like the site. They can see exactly where the level of their tank is at,” he said. “We have a lot of people that don’t live around here, and they can just look on their phone and know that their tank has fuel in it or be alerted if something’s not functioning properly.

“Most of our customers use the app just for that ease of mind because everybody’s so worried about running out of fuel that they get a little nervous and that’s their way of knowing they have plenty of fuel in their tank,” Smith said.

Many, though, are on a scheduled delivery program, so once their fuel tank hits a 25% threshold, the monitor automatically routes into Allied’s software to notify the crew that a top off is needed.

Saving Tens of Thousands of Dollars per Year

This automation prevents Allied from making unnecessary truck rolls. “Everything just boils down to the cost per mile, so the fewer miles we have to put on a route, the better it is for us,” Smith said. “We’re not going to the tank too early.”

He explained that their scheduled delivery program pre-Otodata had been based on past and not current usage, and that monitoring allows them to know if a fill is actually required. “So, if you normally used 300 gallons and all of a sudden you weren’t there for six months, but you normally would be, that’s where we really save the most money,” Smith said.

Allied also decreases driver time by monitoring propane tanks remotely on an app. “I would guess with everything, we are saving save tens of thousands of dollars a year using Otodata.”



Why UScellular and Otodata

“From our service tech standpoint, the ease of install is fantastic. Before with another vendor, we had to put a magnet on the monitor and make sure it was activated properly with a certain light sequence, and if you don’t take off the magnet properly, there are issues. With Otodata, no magnets required. You just hook it on, get your information off the tank and your guys get to leave. They love that,” Smith said.

In addition, Otodata reads monitors even in areas with very low cell signal. With another vendor, Smith said that if the signal was less than 50%, it failed to provide a reading. But with Otodata on UScellular, “I had one at like 2% cell coverage and it still was sending signals just fine. There’s absolutely no issue.”

Smith also appreciates that with Otodata, they receive automatic fill detection, so they get a notice within minutes that a tank was filled.

They also receive instant alerts. “We had a lot of hoops to jump through to get the other vendors’ monitors to work properly and be able to see the customer side. Now we get an email every day about what is happening. If there is an issue, we get an email. Plus, with the portal, I can assign specific routes to each one of those tank monitors, so we have 10 different routes that we run that each one is assigned to its own group and location.”

“It was just kind of a no brainer that we were already working with UScellular. So why not continue the partnership that we already have,” Smith said, adding that he intends to continue ordering only UScellular Otodata monitors moving forward.

To see how UScellular can help your organization, call **866-616-5587** or visit [our website](#).

