
Soil Sampling is Basis of Recommendations

A farmer told me the other day that soil testing was a sales gimmick and he didn't need to spend the money. His fertilizer dealer has devised a program which has worked good for him. This could be true! If a productive and financially sound fertilizer program has been developed for this operation it is because the fertilizer dealer has a sound background in soil test based crop recommendations. There is no other game in town. All fertilizer recommendations are based on soil test correlations and calibration studies. In short, these studies answer the questions: What does this chemical test on this soil mean in terms of plant growth? How does the crop respond to specific types and amounts of fertilizer applications. Unfortunately, there are some fertilizer dealers in the state who recommend fertilizers on a different basis, that is, if we put enough of everything there the crop will grow and so will my sales!

Many Nebraska farmers have not reached the management level where routine soil tests are part of the overall profitable management of the farm business. Those who can manage the details of their operation, like soil testing and profitable fertilizer recommendations continue to become larger and more successful producers.

I would be happy to schedule time to review fertilizer recommendations with any producer interested in reviewing their management decisions. I have been successful in the past in helping producers focus on the key issues of fertility and solve problems in a financially sound matter.

I recently looked at some soil test recommendations where manure applications were supplying all the fertility the crop would ever need and yet the fertilizer dealer was still recommending starter fertilizer and a half rate of nitrogen. This recommendation was costing the producer over \$2,000 and increasing the threat of a pollution problem. Our future manure regulations are very likely going to be based on phosphorus application allotment.

Producer/managers are going to have to improve management solutions to these regulations and it would be best if they have a head start. Livestock operations of any size, which are leaving the business, have to plan for the use of excess nutrients in old lot areas. If they do not, they will be drinking the nitrate. We have been very successful working with interested clients in stopping this problem with minimal cost with some planning.

Precision agriculture can be successful in helping farmers improve management for profit. Precision agriculture is not a one-shot patch on average to poor management. Precision agriculture is a more intense management tool for those operations which have been working on the details of farm management for some time. Some producers were able to take their farm records from the shoe box to a computerized financial management systems with monthly cash flows and detailed year-end financial management reports. Some is a few, some is those with a desire to improve, some is those who got started, some is those who had a goal, some is those who saw opportunity in change, some is a few, some could be you, if you want it to be! Happy New Year!

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