

## Soil Test Now for Next Year's Alfalfa Planting

Will you plant some new alfalfa next spring? How about interseed legumes into pasture? Production and profits can increase if you soil test and maybe even fertilize yet this fall.

Alfalfa and other legumes need more nutrients than most other crops we grow. For example, an average ton of alfalfa hay will contain about 50 pounds of nitrogen, 12 pounds of phosphate, 50 pounds of potash, and 4 pounds of sulfur.

Fortunately, well-nodulated legume plants get their nitrogen from the air. All other nutrients must come from fertilizer or the soil.

Soil tests tell you how much nutrition your soil can provide to your alfalfa and pasture legumes. Then we can determine how much more fertilizer, if any, should be applied for maximum profits. Collect and analyze samples this fall before soils freeze from fields you expect to plant or interseed next year. In fact, gather a “special” soil sample as well. Gather one sample from the usual seven or eight inch depth plus another one only a couple inches deep. This shallow sample will determine if you have an acid surface layer that many growers have been finding recently. If the pH of your surface layer is below 6 but the deeper sample is above 6.2, you need lime, but only half the usual amount. If possible, apply that lime this fall so it can neutralize that acidity, which will speed seedling establishment next spring.

If you find out that you need phosphorus or sulfur or potash, they also can be applied this fall or you can wait until planting next spring.

Alfalfa and pasture legumes can reduce nitrogen costs and boost production and profits. Soil testing can help.

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