

SOIL TEST NEW AND ESTABLISHED ALFALFA

Alfalfa is a hungry crop. Proper fertilizing in spring often is needed to feed alfalfa so it will produce profitable yields. So what are your fertilizer plans?

How much fertilizer should you apply to alfalfa? With increasing fertilizer costs and strong land use competition from other crops, the only way to answer that question intelligently is to first get a soil test. Soil tests tell you the amount of each nutrient your soil can provide to your alfalfa plants. Then you can determine how much more fertilizer, if any, should be applied for maximum profits.

Remember that alfalfa gets most of its nitrogen from the air if the plant roots are well-nodulated. So usually you are just wasting money and fertilizer if you fertilize with nitrogen. However, all other nutrients must come from the soil or from fertilizer.

Many soils in our region provide high quantities of most nutrients. But very few soils provide all the nutrients needed for top alfalfa yields. So fertilizer often is needed.

Collect soil samples as soon as frost is gone from existing alfalfa fields and also from fields you expect to plant to alfalfa this spring or next fall. Send these samples to a lab for analyses of at least phosphorus and soil pH. If your field is sandy, eroded, or highly weathered, also test for potassium and sulfur.

Most important of all, use the results of these soil tests, with advice from your extension educator and fertilizer dealer, to develop an alfalfa fertilizer program designed for your conditions. Better alfalfa profits will be the result.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

