



Direct Connections

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Helping you stay informed!

This Week : George Lubberts : Is soil testing really necessary?



Dave's Corner George Lubberts has spent the last twenty years advising farmers on crop production. His forte is agronomy services that show a return on investment and are within constraints put upon you by high inputs and low commodity prices. Over the next few issues George is going to share some of his thoughts on fertility management. Here's round one:

Soil sampling is probably one of the most frustrating things farmers have to deal with.

If you are trying to track your P levels in manured fields, you need to ask for an absolute test .

Next Week: George , on-, How do you know if micro-nutrients are really needed?

Quote for the week:

“Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it. ”

*George Orwell
(1903 - 1950)*

Why Soil Sample ?

One of those things farmers love to complain about, next to the wheat board and some grain companies, is soil sampling. It is probably one of the most frustrating things farmers have to deal with. The main thing to remember is that the soil sample recommendation is simply a guideline. Yes, the results vary from year to year and lab to lab. My suggestion is to stay with the same lab every year and try to sample at the same time of the year and at the same spot in the field each year. If you are not applying manure, a basic test is sufficient. The depth I would suggest is 0 to 12 inches. This is a compromise but keeps expenses down. A good representative soil test, year after year, will allow you to track your levels over time and give you a good idea if you are on the right track.

Sampling Heavily Manured Fields.

Ever get that test back and it says 60+ for P? What does that mean? Basically, it means that your P test is greater than 60 lbs. Most labs only go that high unless you ask for an absolute value or dilution test result. Dilution or absolute results are important when you are testing soils that you would suspect are very high in nutrients. Manured fields would be very suspect. With the basic test, the results usually go up to 60 or so with P, around 900 or so for K and around 98 or so for S (depending on your lab). Anything above these values is represented as 60+, 900+ or 98+. That means that these nutrients are at levels more than sufficient for growing most crops. However, if you are trying to track your P levels in manured fields, the 60+ result is not exact enough. Any good soil lab will give you absolute or dilution results for a small additional fee. Then you will get the result without the + sign and then you can track your P levels (or any other nutrient) over time.

Nutrient Management

On the farm, we not only need to know the nutrient requirements for our crops, but we need to know if certain nutrients are accumulating and at what levels. By ordering a little additional information on your soil test you will be able to identify any risk areas and know what is happening from year to year in your soil. Having good information will not only save you money, but helps you manage wisely your land and water resource.

George Lubberts is a CCA and professional Agronomist . He operates and owns Complete Agronomic Services here in Southern Alberta . George has dealt extensively with most crops as well as irrigation management and precision agriculture . He lives with his wife, Wilma , and three teenage children in Nobleford.