

Tips for Target Yields

By Potash Institute of North America

Were your yields on target last season? Will they be on target next season? Or do you set a target? This is an age of target setting—higher goals in all kinds of production, fund raising programs, moon trips, etc.

Crop production makes a perfect target, because higher goals are vital to our future food supply. Much agronomic research is aimed toward one target, optimum yields—what they are and how to reach them.

Many growers are asking questions that may help others:

1—Why set a target yield? Incentive. Challenge. Top farmers do it to improve specific practices and efficiency. It helps them shed that old "satisfied with what I get" attitude. It makes them pull all their pieces together into a single goal. It brings them more profits in the end.

2—How do I decide what the target yield should be?

Top farmers are realistic, but also optimistic. Extension advisors and supply people help them take a careful look at their past crop management, local climate, soil conditions, and their capabilities. Seemingly poor soil or weather does not discourage them.

They are like the farmer who grew big alfalfa yields for 5 years—6 to 8 tons per acre—before realizing he was on a soil that wasn't supposed to grow

alfalfa. How did he do it? By carefully preparing the soil and timing all his operations just right—liming, seeding, cutting, and fertilizing for target yields.

The same applied to other crops. Good management—helping plant roots go deeper for more water—is producing good yields on millions of acres once considered unsuitable.

3—What should I do NEXT YEAR if I don't reach the current year's budget target yield?

Plan ahead. Top farmers are always planning . . . and looking for what went wrong. They study their fields during the growing season to find where something could have been done better. They put their heads together with Extension advisors and industry crop specialists to look closely and honestly at their present system. Company specialists can help you set and get those target yields.

4—Could I be over or under estimating the capability of my soil, climate, and management?

You could be, especially during the first year or two on a target yield program. Remember the weather. Was it very good or below average, especially during critical growth stages? Study EACH field for its particular problems. Try check strips of different treatments. Then use the steps that look best. But NEVER let the first year's experience discourage you.

5—Will long range planning

reach target yields?

Both business and governments make long range plans. A good farmer knows he cannot correct acid or low fertility soils or eliminate all weeds in one year. Nor is he likely to go from 100 to 160 bu corn, 80 to 135 bu sorghum, 35 to 50 bu soybeans, or 4 to 8 ton alfalfa in one year. He must have time to study, select, and become proficient with new varieties and practices that continue to flow from fertile minds. This is why a 5-year plan, flexible but clearly set on certain targets, might help reach targets. Realistic target yields will change as new varieties and practices are applied and management improves.

6—How can a new practice change my target yields?

Your weakest practices limit yield. Your strongest practices have an additive or cumulative effect. For example, combine better weed control with earlier planting and you'll get better results from your fertilizer. Weeds steal nutrients, moisture and sunlight from crops.

Good practices compliment each other—improve varieties adapted to local soil and climate, right plant spacing, less tillage, chiseling or deeper plowing on some soils, slower planting and harvesting speeds can all add up to better yields. Changing one practice may demand adjustment in another. The right combination helps hit the target yield.

Well fertilized crops sometimes produce half or less of what they are capable of giving you. It can happen when you use the wrong hybrid or improper plant spacing or poor pest control or any ONE practice that puts HIDDEN BRAKES on fertility. A good researcher carefully watches ALL factors when working to improve just ONE factor. So does a good farmer. Forty or 50 bushels per acre MORE is worth it. This is what trouble shooting is all about.

7—Will increased target yields affect the environment?

Very much so. High row crop yields give a fuller, quicker vegetative cover. This reduces soil and water runoff, means less fertilizer carryover, and allows the more sloping land to stay in forage and trees. High target yields help answer today's concern for environmental quality.

8—Is there a good way to decide how much fertilizer to use for target yields?

Yes. Take nitrogen, for example. Most universities and soil test labs base their advice on yield goal and cropping system. Amount may depend on the region, but continuous corn might average 1.25 lb N applied for each bushel of corn expected. This means a 120 bu target would receive 150 lb N . . . a 160 bu goal would receive 200 lb N. These applications are geared to crop

needs and USE, so they are economically sound for the farmer and ecologically safe for the environment.

The same principle applies to other crops. If the field has received low N rates in the past, you'll have to apply more N than this average at first to get the yields you are shooting for.

9—Are phosphate and potash important to nitrogen use?

Very important. They help you get greater return from nitrogen, as Missouri research has shown. On a soil already testing 200 lb K and receiving 100 lb N and adequate phosphate, first-cut orchardgrass absorbed 50 per

cent of the N applied. When 200 lb K2O was applied, the orchardgrass yields increased 70 per cent and the grass recovered 106 per cent of the nitrogen applied. Balance fertilization is vital.

10—Are farmers really reaching their target yields?

Yes—those who are really trying. We talk much about low soybean yields, yet the tryers consistently hit 40 and 50 bushels . . . and top researchers hit 70+ bushels.

We hear much about low hay yields . . . 2 to 4 tons per acre. But the tryers harvest 6 to 8 tons. We

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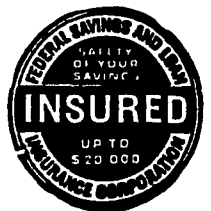
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