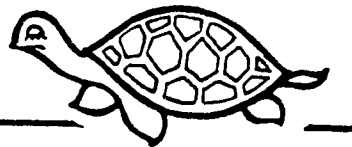


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## Check phosphorus levels before pouring it on

NEWARK, Del. — Recent reports have called attention to the fact that domestic reserves of phosphorus are being used up at a rapid rate. This means a tightening of supply and higher cost.

It takes a lot of energy to process phosphates and this, too, will boost the price of this essential crop nutrient over coming months.

In light of these facts, University of Delaware extension soil specialist Leo Cotnoir urges farmers to take a good look at how they're using phosphorus on their fields these days.

"I think we need to re-evaluate the way in which we apply this material," says Cotnoir. "We're getting an awful lot of Delaware soils which have excessive or more than adequate levels. In these cases there's not going to be any response if you put on more."

When fertilizer materials were cheap and in good supply, it made sense to

apply them broadcast, he adds. It was a good way to build up fertility levels in the soil.

Delaware farmers got away almost entirely from banding phosphorus and other nutrients back then. But now that costs are up and supplies tighter, they need to get the most they can from the least amount. And this means banding.

A lot of growers who'd gotten rid of all their banding equipment are going out now and buying more.

Cotnoir says he thinks it's a good investment, particularly with phosphorus because you can get a lot better response by banding a small amount than you can by broadcasting much more. You won't built up a reserve, but you will get a greater return on your immediate investment. And that's important these days.

Phosphorus is one of those elements that builds up on the soil. Where levels test

high you can go for a long time without adding more of this mineral.

"Some of the fields I've been following have remained in the high to very high range year after year without any additions. The amount that the crop removes is simply not that great. And phosphorus doesn't leach, even on our sandy soils. Once it's there, it's going to be there a long time," he says.

About 80 percent of all the soil samples processed at the University of Delaware's soil test lab run high to very high in phosphorus, reports the specialist. Under these conditions — at least for corn and soybeans — there's no evidence you'll get any yield response to additional applications.

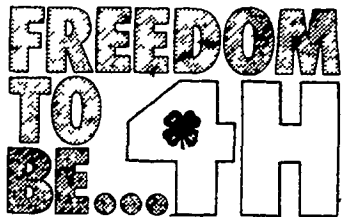
"We feel quite confident in saying that at these levels you can do without phosphorus except perhaps during colder springs or on colder soils, where a very

small amount in the row at planting may help," he says.

"And on very high testing soils, even that may make no difference in yield."

When the price of phosphorus was down around 6 or 7 cents a pound, it didn't matter if you put on more than your crop needed.

At 27 cents a pound, can you still afford to apply 100 pounds per acre of a material that a soil test says you don't need? That's \$27 an acre you can cut from your production costs this year on land that tests high in phosphorus.



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