

Take a look at plant analysis

LANCASTER — For a few years during the late 1960s and the early 1970s, plant analysis or tissue testing created a flurry of interest in agricultural circles. Sophisticated testing equipment that could measure content of several elements at one time was becoming available and researchers who were concerned with shortcomings of soil testing saw this as a major advancement

toward improved lime and fertilizer use efficiency. Plant analysis was (and still is) seen as supplement to, not a replacement for, soil testing says DeKalb Agronomist Wayne Fowler. The concept, still perfectly valid today, was that plant analysis should serve as a sensitive diagnostic tool to monitor the effectiveness of a fertility program based on soil testing. It would help "fine tune" a lime and

fertilizer program and serve to pick up or confirm suspected micronutrient deficiencies. After all, what better way to check the nutrient status of growing plants than to sample and test a few of those same plants? Deficiencies of imbalances, once detected through plant analysis, might explain performance disappointments or enable corrective steps to be taken before the next crop season.

The concept of plant analysis for farm crops was, perhaps, several years ahead of its time. Most people never tried it, a few tried it only once, and only a few have continued to use it. It has remained more of a research and "trouble shooting" tool; not the strong soil testing partner some of us envisioned.

Compared to soil analysis, plant analysis is expensive. Sampling time and technique are more critical. Once test results are available, corrective action generally cannot be initiated in time to benefit the current crop.

Interpretation of results lacks the clear-cut precision users probably prefer. Yet, there is invaluable information to be gained by those who have initiated and faithfully followed a good

soil test program and who want to get maximum return for every dollar spent on lime and fertilizer.

Many university and private testing labs offer plant analysis service on most farm crops. They can give you sampling instructions and quote costs. Some crop consultants will even do the sampling for you, for a fee.

Regardless of who samples and who tests, you should be sure that your test results will be properly interpreted and that you will be given clean indications of what corrective actions, if any, are recommended and why.

The optimum time for plant sampling is at hand. Most labs want corn samples taken when the crop is in early silk. Sorghum usually is sampled just before heading. Soybeans and alfalfa usually give the most meaningful data if sampled just before or at first flower.

Plant analysis can be the next step toward improving lime and fertilizer use efficiency after the benefits of soil testing have peaked. With increasing costs of nutrients, and eventual tight supplies of some predicted, it is good business to use the best diagnostic tools available.

Farm Business News

Attends selling seminar

NEW PROVIDENCE — Donald Nissley, New Providence, recently completed an intensive, three-day professional selling program conducted at the Quality Inn, Harrisburg, by Chromalloy Farm Systems Division, manufacturer of famous Madison feed processing and storage structures.

The entire Chromalloy Farm Systems Division professional selling program was devoted to helping Madison dealers improve their marketing skills to

better serve farmers in their area with the Madison System of Choice.

Products included in this system are the Madison silo for making corn silage, the Madison Nutri-Matic for processing medium-moisture haylage, and the Madison Grain-O-Matic for processing high-moisture grain.

Also sandwiched into the busy training program was thorough instructions on proper feeding techniques of the materials processed in the Madison structures.

Wins research award

NEWARK, Del. — Donald L. Sparks, assistant professor of soil chemistry at the University of Delaware, has received the Sigma Xi Research Award for Ph.D. candidates from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, where he completed his doctoral studies a year ago.

The award is presented each year to that University's outstanding Ph.D. candidate

in the field of science. Sparks' dissertation research, which was in the area of soil potassium chemistry, has since led to four publications in scientific journals and to three presentations at professional meetings.

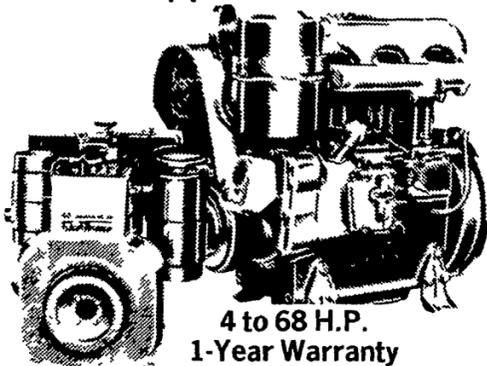
His current research at the Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station concerns boron and potassium leaching in sandy soils.

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