

Fall fertilizing can aid soil

ATLANTA, GA — Harvesting of crops ranks as the first order of business this fall for most farmers across the countryside. Buy many growers will also begin working for future profit opportunities.

Soil testing, fall fertilization, and related management practices can help farmers achieve maximum economic yields. Here are some timely suggestions from agronomists of the Potash & Phosphate Institute (PPI).

Early fall provides an ideal time for soil fertility planning. Fall soil testing can show what toll the year's crop is taking from the soil. Testing labs usually have the capability to turn out results more quickly in the fall than in spring.

Soil tests should be used to monitor the fertilizer program. The soil-crop system is dynamic and under constant change, and guessing cannot evaluate the situation. Reliable soil test data — along with known crop needs, the farmer's management skills and prevailing economic conditions — help build knowledge for a sound fertilizer program.

Phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) can be safely and efficiently applied on many soils during the fall or winter. Level and gently rolling fields with good residue cover generally provide good surface conditions. In effect, P and K can be stored in the soil, minimizing delays and compaction associated with spring application. Spring seeded row crops — including corn, soybeans, and cotton — use fall-applied fertilizer efficiently.

The agronomists don't advise K application on deep sandy soils because of risk of leaching. And they don't advise surface application on steep slopes — over 8%.

Fall fertilization is often compatible with conservation tillage systems, the agronomists note. P and K are vital for rapid seedling growth on cool, moist, conservation-tilled soil with surface

residue. Building soil fertility to higher test levels provides more productive conditions.


Where double cropping is a standard practice, fall fertilization can help supply the needs of both crops. Combinations such as wheat followed by soybeans or wheat followed by grain sorghum remove high amounts of nutrients from the soil.

Alfalfa responds to fall P and K application with increased yields and longevity of stands. Top-dressing in fall allows these nutrients to winterize the crop and be ready to stimulate early growth. Alfalfa removes large amounts of potassium, as well as phosphorus, calcium, magnesium and sulfur.

Pastures also get a boost from fall applications of P and K. For best success of new winter pastures, both overseeded and on prepared seedbeds, P and K should be applied either preplant or at planting.

In some areas, nitrogen (N), as well as P, K and lime, can be fall-applied for wheat.

Apply nitrogen in the ammonium form after soils cool down below 50 degrees (F). Local conditions may also show economic advantage for nitrogen stabilizers




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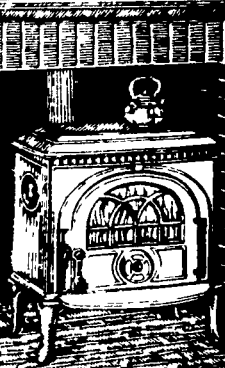
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