Survey Shows Lack Of Sulfur In PA Soils

HOPEWELL, VA — In a fiveyear survey of soil test results from farm land in Pennsylvania, nearly one in three samples were ranked low in the nutrient sulfur.

These results are part of a nationwide survey called "Test For S" that is being conducted by Allied-Signal, Inc., based in Hopewell, VA. Allied initiated

"Test For S" in 1982 to measure the extent of sulfur deficiencies nationwide.

To date, more than 200,000 soil test results have been collected through "Test For S." More than 11,000 are from Pennsylvania. Of these, 3,607 — roughly 32 percent - were ranked low in sulfur. Another 6,628 — about 59 percent were rated medium.

Nationally, more than one in three of the soil test results were ranked low in sulfur. Approximately 41 percent were ranked medium. All samples in the survey were analyzed and rated by university or independent testing labs.

According to Don Messick, an agronomist and soils specialist

with Allied-Signal, a sulfur deficiency that goes undetected and uncorrected can reduce the yield and quality of many crops.

"If a crop lacks sufficient sulfur, or any other nutrient, then it will only grow until it becomes stressed for that nutrient," explains Messick. To avoid midseason shortages of sulfur, Messick advises

growers to tissue test after crop emergence. Field scouting is also a good idea. In corn, look for palegreen to yellow leaves, with striping sometimes evident. If a yieldreducing sulfur deficiency exists, a sidedress application is one way to correct the problem.

"Most farmers already know that sidedressing nitrogen can increase fertilizer efficiency and provide a better return on investment," says Messick. "But few realize that the same holds true for sulfur."

Like nitrogen, sulfur moves casily into the subsoil, beyond the reach of plant roots. To reduce losses from leaching, Messick says growers should combine sulfur with their sidedress applications of nitrogen. For optimum growth and efficiency, the nitrogen-to-sulfur ratio of the plant tissue should be no greater than 15-to-1.

For sidedress applications, it's important to use a fertilizer that contains the sulfate form of sulfur. such as ammonium sulfate (21-0-0-24S). "Sulfate is the only form of sulfur that can be taken up by crop roots," explains Messick. "Elemental sulfur, on the other hand, must be converted into the sulfate form before it can be used by the crop. This can delay uptake by several months."



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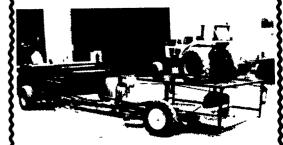
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