

# Agronomist Offers Fall Nutrient Management Tips

UNIVERSITY PARK, (Centre Co.) — As the weather gets cool and the leaves turn color, Pennsylvania farmers should be carefully planning their nutrient management strategy for the fall and winter months.

But many farmers delay or ignore fertility planning during the busy fall harvest season, said Dr. Douglas Beegle, professor of agronomy in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "It is economically and environmentally important to make time for nutrient management," he said.

The first step in the process is the soil test. "Fall is the best time of year to perform soil tests, said Beegle. "It's the time when nutrient levels are lowest, so you can get a good idea of what nutrients are needed most in your fertility program. Fall testing also gives farmers plenty of time before spring to get results back and make good

decisions about the types and quantities of nutrients to apply."

Whether a farmer tests soil in the spring or fall, it's important that tests be done at the same time each year, Beegle said. "That way you can get consistent data and keep track of trends in your soil's nutrient levels."

Autumn is a time when a lot of manure is spread on fields, although the ideal time to apply manure is in the spring, closer to the time of peak plant growth. If you do plan a fall manure application, Beegle says it is important to plan carefully and not arbitrarily apply equal amounts to all fields.

"Fields should be prioritized, based on several factors," he said. "High priority fields should be those that test low for various nutrients, or those going into corn next season, since corn needs a lot of nitrogen. Also, consider fall or winter manure application for fields

that usually are wet in the spring, so you can avoid digging ruts or compacting soft soil." He said fields to avoid in the fall are those on steep slopes or near streams, where nutrients are likely to wash off before they can be utilized by next year's crops.

Before deciding how much manure to apply, said Beegle, have it analyzed so you know what you are spreading on the fields. Then, take into account the nutrient needs of the crops you plan to raise. It also is a good idea to calibrate your manure spreader to be sure the correct amount is being applied.

Planting a winter cover crop in the fall is usually a sound decision for a couple of reasons, according to Beegle. Without a cover crop, only about 20 percent of the nitrogen in the manure applied this fall still will be available to new crops next spring. By planting a winter grain or a cover crop, such as

wheat or rye respectively, you can increase nitrogen utilization from this fall's manure to about 40 percent. "The cover crop will scavenge nitrogen so it can't be lost," said Beegle. "Then when it's killed or plowed under in the spring, that

nitrogen will be released for the next crop."

Beegle said a cover crop also can provide forage for livestock feed. "Cover crops can be planted as late as November," he said.

## Poultry Pointers

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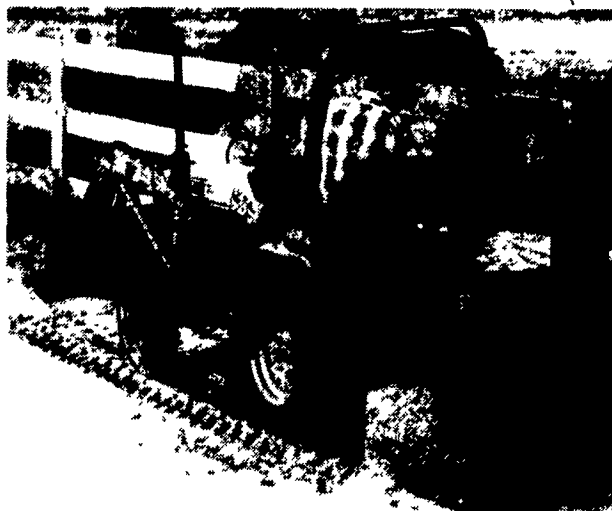
icantly reduced tissue among the feed treatments. A reduction in breast muscle probably reduced metabolic demand, and hence cardiac output, thereby reducing ascites. So the observed improvement in ascites susceptibility came at the cost of reduced breast yield! So be wary of plans to reduce

ascites until you know what other production parameters they impact and be sure they fit your production goals.

All told, it looks like another beautiful autumn in Centre County and, with any luck, we'll be Rose Bowl Bound by winter. Remember that the fluctuating temperatures in the spring and fall wreak havoc with management systems, and even mildly cool temperatures can cause an increase in ascites and related mortality.

With a little effort and patience, we can develop new management strategies to remedy problems in the field, in the short-term. Long term solutions will be available as we understand the cause of the problem, after which we can incorporate the results into an effective genetic and/or nutritional plan.

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