

Nutrient Management Plans Expose Fertilization Opportunities

NORCROSS, Ga.—In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on nutrient management plans to improve the matching of nutrient inputs with production potentials. With nutrient management plans, better recommendations can be developed for nutrient rates, sources, timings, and application methods to achieve farmer agronomic, economic, and environmental objectives.

All nutrient management plans should be based on soil tests. Too often though, they start and end with collecting a composite soil sample from each field on the farm and following the soil test recommendation. Soil test results and recommendations are excellent tools, but should only be a starting place in nutrient management planning. Soil test results can be made more powerful when combined with the following information:

- Farmer managerial skills.
- Achievable yield goals and the potential for yield improvements.
- Soil physical conditions which either enhance or limit crop response.
- All nutrient inputs.
- Crop nutrient uptake demand and harvest removals.
- Opportunities to build soil test levels to increase yields.

•Opportunities to minimize risks from drought, diseases, excessive moisture, and other crop stresses.

- Landlord/renter relationships.
- Environmentally sensitive areas.

Good yields will be critical to profitability this year, because of low crop prices. Producing high yields with low cost per unit of grain, fiber, meat, milk, or other commodity is the challenge, every year. Every farmer needs to capitalize on the seemingly rare years with favorable weather and good crop prices. A good nutrient management plan can ensure that opportunities are not lost. In years of low crop prices, past efforts to build soil tests to optimum agronomic levels will pay off in greater flexibility to adjust production budgets.

On farms where animal waste is a resource, experiences with nutrient management plans indicate that nutrient imbalances are not uncommon. The nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium ratio of animal wastes, and the disproportionate crop uptake and removal of these three nutrients often result in elevated phosphorus levels in some fields. Many of these same fields may benefit from potassium addition. With nutrient management plans, these fields, or sub-fields, can be better identified for management changes.

Animal waste applications may be adjusted or redirected to other fields to better match plant nutrient requirements. Nitrogen and potassium rates can be planned to bring soil fertility levels in balance with plant demands.

Most soil testing labs offer recommendations that are based on the probability of response to lime or nutrient additions. Many also consider the requirements for building soil tests to research-supported optimum levels over a reasonable period of time. These different soil test recommendations are often labeled as "lab recommendation philosophies." In reality, every farmer should consider not just what might be beneficial this year, but also for the long term. This means that soil test "suf-

ficiency," "build-and-maintenance," and "drawdown" approaches may be equally viable. Each of these approaches should be considered on every field on every farm and probably on sub-field units as well.

Nutrient management plans can be tailored to individual producer needs. With nutrient management plans, farmers can develop short-term and long-term strategies for each field to achieve: soil fertility goals, high yields, field-by-field environmental objectives, and maximized profit potential.

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Pennsylvania Forage And Grassland Council Forms To Help Farmers

HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — On November 22, 1960, the Pennsylvania Grassland Council, which later became the Forage and Grassland Council, was formed by a group of farmers, industry representatives, and educators with a single vision: "working together for better forage programs."

The Grassland Council's original statement of purpose has been modified with time but the content remains relatively unchanged: "collection, coordination, and dissemination of information on all phases of Pennsylvania grassland agriculture."

The Pennsylvania Grassland Council was the first such organization in the United States. Its formation served as a model for other states as 34 other councils in the U.S. and Canada have been formed.

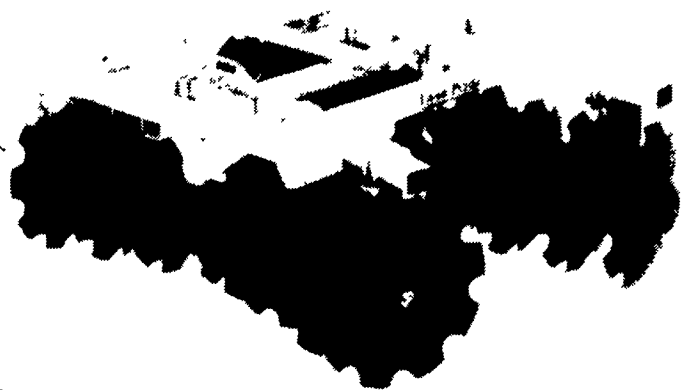
So when you hear or read about a Forage and Grassland Council in a state other than Pennsylvania, you now know it all started here in the Keystone state 40 years ago.

From the Grassland Council's beginning it was clear that it was not the council's intent to displace or compete with other organizations, but rather to encourage collaboration of grassland activities within Pennsylvania. The council hosted regional and statewide con-

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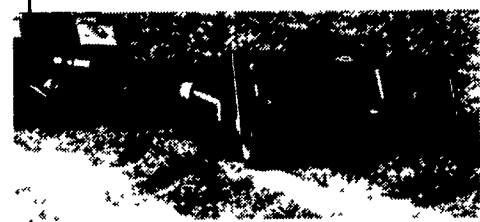
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