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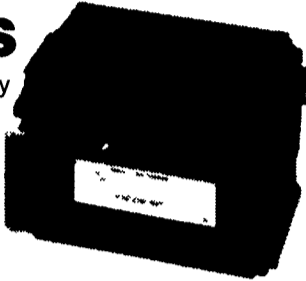
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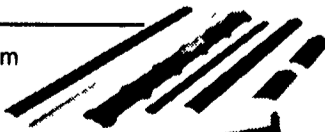
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**Capitol Region
Agronomy Team
Report**



CORN AND LIQUID NITROGEN APPLICATION ISSUES

Mark Goodson
Agronomy Extension Agent
York County

Each year farmers have to make decisions about nitrogen fertilization of their corn. It's that time again. This article will focus on pros and cons of various popular methods of liquid N application.

•Field nitrogen losses. Soils tend to lose nitrogen easily - this is a simple fact of nature. Soil testing labs, including Penn State's, do not even test for nitrogen because, by the time the sample gets to the lab, the nitrogen is lost to the air. Soils lose nitrogen through volatilization (evaporation) of ammonia to the air and through leaching (percolation with water down away from root zone) of nitrate. Losing nitrogen either way costs the farmer money and could hurt the environment, including his own drinking water well. The earlier that nitrogen is applied to the field before the crop actually takes it up, the more vulnerable it is to field losses.

•Liquid nitrogen. 30 percent nitrogen solution ("liquid N", UAN, or "Nitan") is urea and ammonium nitrate dissolved in water. This popular, inexpensive and versatile fertilizer is usually applied at planting or as sidedressing. It is easy to handle with pumps and hoses and often the lowest cost material per unit N.

Some of the nitrogen in liquid N is from urea and prone to volatilization. Volatilization of N from urea occurs when urea is not incorporated either by rain or light tillage.

Once in the soil, most of the N

converts into nitrate within a week or two. The nitrate form of nitrogen is easily leached and can be lost through percolation if crops do not use it before rainfall pushes it out of the reach of roots.

•Preplant versus preemergence seedbed application. Placing all the nitrogen in the seedbed, either worked in at seedbed preparation or applied with pre-emergence chemicals before the corn emerges, is popular because it gets the chore of N application done early in the season. Incorporating liquid N lightly into the seedbed just before planting is preferable to applying with chemicals after planting because it eliminates the chance for N to volatilize if timely rains do not come. Each day that passes without rain to incorporate the N increase the amount that is lost through volatilization to the atmosphere. However, applying nitrogen during seedbed preparation requires an additional trip over the field compared to N application with preemergence pesticides.

•Seedbed versus sidedress application. Sidedressing is often promoted because nitrogen is applied close to the time of plant uptake. This is good, sound agronomy. However, it requires a trip through the field when the corn is up. Application equipment availability is also an issue in some parts of the region. In some cases, your local commercial custom applicator may have all of their row equipment on herbicide work at sidedressing time. If sidedressing equipment is available, consider applying most of your N this way.

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