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### BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR FERTILIZER

**In agriculture, as in many other industries, science has determined best management practices—practices that ensure efficient use of resources and minimize impacts on the environment.** They enable profitability for producers while guarding the public interest.

**So, what specific practices are best for fertilizer?** Managing fertilizer consists of applying the right product, in the right amount, at the right time, to the right place. If a set of management practices is to be considered “best”, all four considerations must be right.

**First, choose the right product.**

- Consider the ratio of nutrient elements and forms the crop needs.
- Look for the appropriate solubility, salt index, and slow-release characteristics.
- Think about blending and handling properties.
- Ponder the price.

**Second, choosing the right rate to apply requires a lot of background work.**

- Scout fields for visual symptoms.
- Sample soils and plants for analysis.
- Analyze samples at a good lab with quality analysis and control.
- Consider the crop's yield potential and balance its removal of nutrients.
- Credit other sources like manures and previous crops.
- Interpret the above using response data to determine a rate that is economically sound.

**Third, apply at the right time.**

- Don't let nutrient applications delay planting.
- Delay nitrogen applications until just before the crop needs the nutrient.
- Split nitrogen applications through the season.
- Make sure early seedling growth is not limited.

**Fourth, place the nutrients where they are needed and keep them there.**

- Map and manage soil variability among and within fields.
- Band or incorporate wherever possible.
- Keep at a safe distance from the seed.
- Use conservation tillage to minimize runoff and erosion.
- Maintain a buffer zone between the fertilized field and any watercourses.
- Grow cover crops to retain mobile nutrients for the next growing season.

The practices that apply specifically to fertilizer are numerous and technical. The complexity of the choices demands the involvement of qualified professionals. **Seeking out a qualified crop adviser is an excellent way for a producer to adopt the best management practices that improve both profitability and accountability.**

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