



Summer 2005, No. 5

### THE TWIN TOOLS FOR NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT...HAVE YOU NEGLECTED ONE?

**Plant tissue nutrient analysis is an often-overlooked tool that should be used more frequently by farmers and crop advisers.**

**Excellent crop yields were recorded in much of the U.S. in 2004.** As a result, record nutrient removal from fields occurred with the crop harvests. Higher yields and a hectic hurricane season in the southern U.S., coupled with a relatively moist fall, led to later-than-normal harvest completion in many areas. Now, a relatively wet spring may have further interfered with needed soil sampling and soil testing activities.

**To compound plant nutrition challenges in 2005, increased fertilizer costs have caused some farmers to reduce fertilizer applications.** The wisdom of such cost-reduction decisions can be challenged and will largely depend on soil fertility levels. Confidence in those soil fertility levels may be somewhat limited this year because of the inability to collect soil samples last fall, because of wet weather this spring, or because of changes that occurred with nutrient drawdown by the high yields of 2004.

**Soil testing is an excellent tool, but soil sampling and soil testing have limitations.** Relying only on soil testing can result in some surprises and disappointments.

**Plant tissue nutrient analysis is the “twin tool” in the crop management toolbox that can help farmers and crop advisers avoid those disappointments.** Plant tissue nutrient analysis can be used to help detect problems and to evaluate plant nutrition and fertilization programs. Often, it can identify in-season nutrition problems in time to take corrective action if samples are collected early enough. It can also help build confidence in the performance of the nutrient management program.

**During many agronomic training presentations this past winter, I asked audiences if they had collected any plant tissue samples for nutrient analyses in 2004.** I was surprised...and disappointed...to learn that fewer than 10 people out of more than 1,000 collected samples or conducted plant tissue nutrient analyses in 2004. With today's rapid shipping services to labs, advanced laboratory analytical capability, and near instantaneous return of results using the internet or email, failing to use this tool constitutes a forfeiture of a competitive advantage for North American farmers. The cost is affordable and doubts about adequate plant nutrition can be evaluated.

With the potential for Asian soybean rust this year, more crop fields will be visited and scouted for problems. Consult your plant nutrition professional and your plant analysis laboratory for advice on collecting and shipping plant tissue samples properly.

**Steer your crop toward a healthy 2005 season with the other “twin tool” – plant tissue nutrient analysis.**

—CSS—

For more information, contact Dr. Cliff S. Snyder, Southeast Director, PPI, P.O. Drawer 2440, Conway, AR 72033-2440. Phone: (501) 336-8110. E-mail: [csnyder@ppi-far.org](mailto:csnyder@ppi-far.org).