



Fall 2006, No. 4

COORDINATE FOR SUCCESS

Coordinate your nutrients. Today's farmers are often the ones making decisions about how much nitrogen they should apply. But when it comes to phosphorus and potassium, they may still rely on what they did in the past or be disengaged from rate and placement decisions. Liming also can be lost in the shuffle, but is important for optimizing nutrient availability and crop use. Better communication between farmer and adviser will help allocate funds to the right overall combination of nutrients and/or lime for fields or field areas.

Coordinate your sources. In times of higher fertilizer prices, some farmers are considering applying manure or biosolids where they haven't before. The upside to these sources is the carbon it adds to soils—a benefit beyond just nutrients. The downside is the inability to control the relative amounts of each nutrient applied. A sound strategy, when possible, is to combine occasional applications of organic sources with commercial fertilizer applications to keep all nutrients at desired levels while taking advantage of more carbon.

Coordinate your management. Nutrients impact other parts of the crop production system. Recent research in Wisconsin shows that soybeans with adequate potassium have lower aphid populations. Many research studies for several crops also link proper nutrition to improved disease resistance or decreased disease severity.

Coordinate your objectives. Not every field needs the same nutrient management strategy. For instance, fields with short-term rental agreements may justify keeping soil test phosphorus and potassium levels lower. Fields that will be farmed for a while justify higher levels that are non-limiting. From the landlord's perspective, non-limiting soil test levels and pH can lead to greater land value.

Coordinate your information. Great value exists in looking at how things change over time. For instance, one of the best uses of soil test data is to monitor how levels change over years. Yield maps collected over time can also help identify consistently higher or lower producing areas in the field that require different management strategies.

Coordinate your risks. We need to examine how various risks are interconnected. For instance, keeping plants properly fed, which reduces agronomic risk, can also ensure that revenue won't be shorted – economic risk. Overfeeding crops may reduce agronomic risk, but increases economic risk because money gets allocated to quantities of nutrients that aren't needed.

The way things operate today, we get a lot of information from a lot of different places. We need to remember that we manage businesses founded on crops and cropping systems, not separate components like nutrients, seed, and pest control. By staying coordinated, we maximize our chances for success.

For those interested, the concepts and studies in this article are discussed in more detail in a series of articles published by the Potash & Phosphate Institute. You can find them at > www.ppi-ppic.org/fall2006<.

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