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NATIONAL YIELDS HAVE INCREASED...HAVE YOURS KEPT PACE?

By nature, the majority of us have a very competitive spirit. We thrive on being able to stay even with our peers...and maybe, if we are willing to admit it ...we want to be better than the average. This is true whether we enjoy sporting events or if we are involved in supporting our youth in spelling bees at elementary schools. We have a strong desire to compete well ...and we want to be winners.

As agricultural input costs have increased, most farmers have sought ways to be “winners” by improving profitability on each field of the farm, either by reducing input costs or by increasing crop output per unit cost. This latter approach is considered the only truly sustainable way to become more efficient, because one can only reduce input costs for so long before reaching the point of diminishing returns. In plant nutrition terms, you can only mine nutrients from the soil for so long before yields suffer and profitability declines...an unsustainable situation.

Although nobody has a certain future or a guarantee of what tomorrow might bring, we can glance back at the past to help chart our course for the future. A glance back at the U.S. national average yields of corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, and rice reveals the following average crop yields per acre in 1990: corn, 119 bushels; soybean, 34.1 bushels; cotton, 632 pounds lint; wheat, 39.5 bushels; and rice, 5,529 pounds. The percentage increases in 2005 yields over the 1990 yields are: 24.2% for corn, 27% for soybean, 31.5% for cotton, 6.3% for wheat, and 19.4% for rice.

As you plan for this next cropping season, consider evaluating the track records on your individual fields in comparison to these increases in national average crop yields. Drought, excessive moisture, diseases, and insects can take their toll...but is it possible that inadequate soil fertility has limited yield increases in your fields?

Remember that with increased yields comes increased crop nutrient removal. Has your fertility program kept pace with crop nutrient removal? Contact your crop adviser, take stock of your soil fertility levels, evaluate your lime and fertilizer program, and act now to increase productivity on your farm through improved plant nutrition.

A good crop nutrition program can help you better compete with your neighbors: here in the U.S. and globally. Don't fall behind.

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