

Save Money On Fertilizer

BLUE SPRINGS, MO.

Despite soaring input costs, farmers should not give in to the temptation to skimp on fertilizer, said a University of Missouri Extension specialist.

“The truth is that farmers can’t afford not to adequately fertilize their soils,” said Travis Harper, MU Extension West Central Region agronomy specialist. “Most farmers know this but still look for ways to cut corners to save on their fertilizer bills.”

Harper said cutting corners on fertilizer could be risky, but there are a few simple things farmers can do to effectively limit fertilizer expenses:

- Know what your crop needs. All crops need the same nutrients, but they need different levels of these nutrients at different times in the growing season. For example, wheat needs substantial levels of phosphorus in the fall but very little nitrogen. In the spring, wheat needs high levels of nitrogen but probably does not need additional phosphorus.

- Test your soil. Many farmers apply the same amount of nutrient every year without testing their soil. This may result in farmers applying too much of a particular nutrient.

“Many farmers do not worry about this small excess, but it can quickly add up,” Harper said. “For example, let’s say you apply 50 pounds of

phosphorus per acre every year on your soybeans. A soil test might reveal that you only need 45 pounds of phosphorus. It doesn’t seem like much, but if you do this on 500 acres, you have just unnecessarily spent an extra \$2,500.”

For information about soil testing, contact your local extension center or the MU Extension Soil and Plant Testing Laboratory at (573) 882-0623.

- Invest in fertilizer if you are looking to limit taxes by reinvesting profits into your operation. Build up phosphorus and potassium levels in your soil so that you only need to apply a small amount in succeeding years to adequately fertilize your crop.

- Consider alternative fertilizer sources. Animal wastes, especially poultry litter, are regaining popularity. While poultry litter can be an effective alternative fertilizer, it is important to use and manage it properly.

“Poultry litter should only be used on soils that are deficient in phosphorus and potassium,” Harper said. “When poultry litter is used primarily as a nitrogen source, excessive levels of phosphorus may appear in the soil, causing a number of problems. For this reason, and others, poultry litter should not be used year after year, even on soils that need phosphorus and potassium.”

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