

Soybeans Are No Longer Step-Child To Corn

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“Soybeans are different from corn,” said David Dunn, manager of the soil testing lab at University of Missouri Delta Center. Fertilization, response to lime are the principal differences.

“In the past soybeans have been a step-child to the corn crop,” he explained. “It turns out that farmers put most of their management efforts into corn and let the soybeans take care of themselves. One thing that implies is that they fertilize the corn crop and let the soybeans scavenge the fertilizer left over.”

However, it turns out that in the past few years, crop prices and yield goals have changed marketedly in corn and soybeans.

“When I first arrived here at the Delta Center in 1997 the average yield goal for corn was 190 bushels and an extravagant yield goal was 225,” Dunn said. “Bring that forward 14 years and now an average corn yield goal at the soil testing lab is 200 bushels while extravagant is 250 bushels. That’s about a 10 percent to 20 percent increase over that 14-year time period.”

Contrast that to soybeans, when the average yield goal and the soil test recommendation in 1997 was 35 bushels per acre and the shoot-for-the-moon type thing was 60 bushels an acre.

“Now our average soil test goal is 55 bushels per acre and the shoot-for-the-moon people are asking 90 to 100 bushel per acre out of their soybeans,” he pointed out. “That’s a 30 percent to 50 percent increase in the yield goal.”

How does that play forward in terms of fertilizer recommendations? In terms of P&K, a corn crop needs about one-third to one-fourth a pound of each nutrient to make a bushel, whereas a soybean crop needs nine-tenths of a pound of P and a pound and a half of potash to make a bushel.

Considering the relative yields, soybeans need quite a bit more of P&K per acre than does corn. Farmers must consider whether it still makes sense to fertilize their corn and not their soybeans.

“It doesn’t,” he said. “Corn is different than soybeans, fertilizer is much more important to soybeans. We need to get away from the mind set where we’re just planting soybeans to maintain the rotation. With the increasing value of soybeans, we’re cultivating and growing soy-



David Dunn, manager of the soil testing lab at University of Missouri Delta Center explains how crop prices and yield goals have changed farmers management efforts regarding soybeans.

Photo by John LaRose Jr.

beans now for their own sake. The increased yield goals combined with the increased value of soybeans should have farmers paying more attention to fertilizer and lime.” Δ

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