

## Soil Testing

Testing allows farmers to measure the level of nutrients in the soil, such as soil pH, nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus, and from those numbers, make more informed decisions in fertilizer application that are good for crops as well as a farmers' budgets.

With both phosphorus and potassium skyrocketing in price, a soil test would reveal how much potassium and phosphorus are currently available in the soil. Unlike nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are not directly related to yield, so once present at adequate concentrations adding more would not result in additional productivity.

Other things growers can determine from a soil test include soil pH, which reveals whether or not lime is needed; buffer pH, which indicates how much lime should be applied; and the amount of fertilizer necessary based on specific cropping systems.

A list of private certified soil test labs is available at <http://www.agry.purdue.edu/ext/soiltest.html>.

Whether you own it or rent it, land is one of your highest-priced production assets. To get the most return from your investment you need to ensure adequate fertility to optimize crop response and maximize yields. That's why soil testing should be a key part of any crop production program.

By the way, these same principles apply to home vegetable gardens and lawns and to us as managers of our small landholdings. While cost and profitability may not be such big issues to the home gardener, the application of excess fertilizer is wasteful of the resource and has a bad reputation for polluting our Indiana waters.

Remember, a free area Farming and Agribusiness Breakfast will be held at 7:30 a.m. Tuesday, February 12, at the Central Indiana Power Conference Center, 2243 East Main Street, Greenfield. The event is sponsored by the Hancock, Henry, and Shelby County community foundations in partnership with the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

Purdue Ag Economics Professor Otto Doering will speak about the U.S.D.A. 2007 Farm Bill. Attorney William J. Dale will present a Farm and Estate Planning segment of the program. For reservations call Megan at the Hancock County Community Foundation, (317) 462-8870, or e-mail [mstone@hccf.cc](mailto:mstone@hccf.cc).

Also, small business owners as well as farmers who are marketing a crop direct to consumers can learn more about how to maximize the return from limited promotion dollars at an upcoming program entitled "BIG BANG for Small Bucks."

This Small Business Marketing Tools Workshop will be held from 6-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 21, at Central Indiana Power in Greenfield. It is designed for farmers and business owners in and around Greenfield and Hancock County who need help in marketing and customer development. Preregistration is required; a \$10 fee offsets expenses. Please give me a call at 462-1113 if you are interested.

## **Soil Testing Instructions**

Collect dry one cup of soil on a plain white paper plate or other clean surface – nothing with ink like newspaper or colored paper plates or towels.

Take the sample to Harvestland (formerly Ag One) at 230 W. Osage, Greenfield; 462-5551.

Pay an \$8.50 fee and the sample will be sent off to Suretek Lab - the lab pays for return shipping.

The folks at Harvestland wait until they have 8-10 samples before submitting them, so it's a 2-3 week process (this is in spring when there are many more requests than in, say, December.)

They also have do-it-yourself kits priced at \$8.99 (10 different tests), and \$4.30 (pH test only).

The folks at Harvestland will explain to customers the difference among the tests.