

Weekly Radio Ag Report
April 10, 2013
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As we enjoy typical spring weather with rainy days mixed in with sunny ones, I wanted to talk a little bit about fertilizers and in particular nitrogen for those grass pastures and cereal grain fields. Now alfalfa can fix its own nitrogen, so while it requires other nutrients, it rarely needs extra nitrogen. But nitrogen is by far the most prevalent fertilizer needed to optimize yield and protein content of grains and grass pastures. There are a few important points to keep in mind to make sure you can get a profitable return on your fertilizer investment:

- First, and foremost, is that an adequate supply of water is critical. Crops suffering from moisture stress won't benefit from added nitrogen. So, if you anticipate short water during summer, tempering nitrogen applications to match spring water availability makes sense.
- The second major consideration is the prevalence of weeds and the stand density of the crop. Most weeds are very aggressive and efficient users of nitrogen in the soil, so fertilizing a weedy field or a sparse crop usually makes the situation worse instead of better.
- And third, deficiencies of other nutrients will dampen the effect of nitrogen fertilizer, so make sure you have a tissue test or soil test to evaluate overall fertility status of the field. For the dollars associated with fertilizer cost or potential losses in yield, testing is worth the effort.

Unlike nutrients like phosphorous, potassium, and sulfur, when it comes to nitrogen, you can't store a long-term supply in the soil. It is a use or lose situation so timing of application is important. An early spring application, just as grass begins to green up and grow, is a good place to start. Most of the time two smaller applications applied during the growing season are more effective than a large application all at once. For example, on irrigated pastures a follow-up application in June or just after first cutting has been shown to promote forage production later in summer, again assuming adequate water is available.

For you homeowners, as you've probably guessed, many of these same principles apply to fertilizing your lawn. Start with warmer temperatures in spring and then plan on making a couple of smaller applications spread out into early summer. These smaller applications will be more effective than a single large one.

So, that will do it for this week's report, but as always feel free to give us a call at 251-8133.

