

Still Time to Deal With Soil Fertility This Spring



If you're one who fertilizes for both crops for the next two years ahead of one of the crops, likely corn, you may be a dying breed. At least that's what a press release from Mosaic says. The company used Max Grady, a crop fertility specialist with Kova Ag Products of Milford as an example. Kova has other locations in Indiana, including headquarters for the company at Greensburg.

"Everyone we service here is in a 50/50 rotations doing minimal till or no-till, and we're moving to fertilizing prior to each crop year for that year's crop," Grady says. One factor that likely influenced some folk to quit applying two years at once was the run-up in fertilizer prices a year ago. Suddenly it became very expensive to apply all the phosphorus and potassium that might be required for two crops at one time. Prices are down some, but it would still be an expensive proposition which could affect loan requests and taxation results for any one year.

Another factor is the shift toward precision applications, Grady says. "Seventy percent of our applications are now done using variable-rate technology, with nutrients applied on a prescription basis," he continues.

Key to making precision applications and variable –rate programs work is a detailed, accurate soil testing program, Grady says. Kova agronomists are asking for tests on micro nutrients too these days. One that is showing up deficient in several cases wasn't thought about much twenty years ago. However, sulfur is now beginning to show up as lacking in some areas of Indiana. Until the past two decades, plenty of sulfur was emitted by utility plant smokestacks, surely enough to keep crops supplied with all they needed. With the emphasis on scrubbers and cleaning up the environment, plus new ultra low sulfur requirements for diesel fuel over the past few years, Jim Camberato, Purdue University agronomist, has even confirmed that there are occasions where sulfur is not as plentiful as it once was. At the same time, that doesn't mean that it's always needed.

Grady advises using K-Mag to provide sulfur in the sulfate form. In a company press release, Grady said yields were up 5 to 10 bushels per acre for soybeans and 30 to 40 bushels per acre for corn after applying more micronutrients.

For alfalfa, Nick Musser, Twelve Mile, with Moss Fertilizer, uses K-Mag as a source of both magnesium and sulfur. He works with lots of dairymen in his area.