

Feeling Farm Price Pinch?

Proper Fertilization May Help Things, Agent Says

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It appears that our mountain farmers are being caught in a price squeeze along with farmers in other areas.

One way we can help the farmer through this readjustment period is by teaching him something about the soil he uses as the basis of his production. I believe, in the past, too little emphasis has been placed on the needs of the soil and the best way to obtain proper fertilization. Next year, for the first time, the PMA is requiring soil tests on farms partici-

pating in their program of soil conservation; however, their program is still vague in encouraging farmers to home mix his fertilizers in order to obtain a better fertilization and to make a substantial saving on their fertilizer cost.

For several years, the majority of test demonstration farmers have been taking advantage of the free soil testing service in this state, and found it of great value to themselves and to the extension service in obtaining information on which to base recommendations in given areas.

A good example of the value of soil testing and proper fertilization has been a research project carried out on the Wallace Morgan farm in Macon County for the past seven years. When Wallace came to the farm in 1946, he took over a grown up acreage of land which had been abandoned because of the low productivity. A major portion of this farm is sloping to steep land which in 1946 was in sedge and scrub pine. In 1947 a two-acre field was cleared and prepared for alfalfa. On the basis of soil tests and our knowledge of the soil, two tons of lime and 1,200 pounds of

fused tricalcium phosphate were worked into the top four inches of the soil, which is a Rabun Clay loam. Oats and vetch were seeded in the fall of 1947 and lespedeza the following spring. The lespedeza was turned and 600 pounds of 2-12-12 was applied in the fall and the alfalfa was seeded. A good stand was obtained and has been top-dressed annually with 200 pounds 60% muriate of potash per acre. A similar system has been used on all the fields on this farm which have been cleaned up and seeded to alfalfa or ladino clover-orchard grass. On many of the later seedings a mixed fertilizer consisting of 1,200 pounds of 27% phosphate, 200 pounds 60% potash, and 50 pounds 33% ammonium nitrate has been substituted for the 2-12-12 fertilizer. Yields on all fields used for hay have been consistently higher than the average yields on other farms in the county. Alfalfa has been producing three to four tons per year, even in the fifth year. Ladino-orchard-grass has been producing two tons or better per year. In dry years such as the past two years' yields have fluctuated with the weather, but make a more rapid response when moisture is available.

In 1953 soil scientists from our soil testing laboratory took a number of samples on these fields to obtain information on the results of this type of fertilization. As a result of these tests, and other information, some revisions in our recommendations are being made. Soil samples were taken at two levels, 0-3 inches and 4-6 inches. On fields which had had heavy applications of phosphate at seeding and none since, the 0-3 inch area showed high to very high in phosphate while the lower level ran from low to very low in phosphate. Since the latest research shows that plants pick up phosphate from this lower level, it appears that we should apply phosphate at deeper levels, possibly down to at least six inches for alfalfa. On the basis of experiment station recommendations it now appears desirable to apply smaller rates of phosphate at tests it appears that more re-

seeding and use a small amount each year for maintenance; however, on the basis of these search is necessary. It is possible that there is a high phosphate fixation which would be released if top-dressing phosphate were added.

On the potash tests, both levels showed high to very high with the lower level a little lower. Crop responses are being obtained by top-dressing with potash even though our mountain soils have a relative high amount of potash in the natural state and also a much higher amount of exchangeable potash than other areas. There is a definite need for more research of this subject with our mountain soils.

On land which has not been previously limed, two tons per acre seems to be adequate, and then one ton each five years on high producing forage crops. What savings can a farmer make by using single ingredient fertilizers? On the basis of a 2-12-12 and 0-9-27, which are our seeding and maintenance fertilizers for pasture and hay crops, a farmer can save approximately \$10 per ton, or \$2.50 per acre, over mixed commercial fertilizers. Most farmers have at least 20 acres of good pasture and hay so they can save approximately \$50 on these crops alone. Corresponding savings can also be made on row crops. UTD farmers that obtain phosphate and nitrates at a reduced price can make even greater savings to beat the price squeeze and still get a very good fertilization on their farms. Cutting down the amount of fertilizer used is not the way to get by when profits are falling; however, to get your fertilization needs at a lower cost is using common sense.

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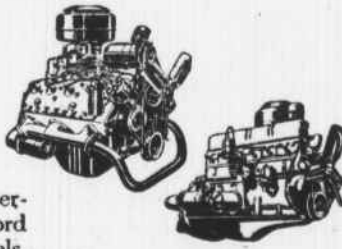
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