

THE LEADING EDGE

www.yetterco.com · [Yetter Manufacturing Inc](http://www.yetterco.com) · [E-mail:info@yetterco.com](mailto:info@yetterco.com)

A PUBLICATION DEDICATED TO MAXIMIZING YIELD POTENTIAL

Starter Fertilizer to the Rescue

Successful farming operations depend on many factors that are out of producers' control. Fortunately, technology has advanced to the point that producers can counteract many less-than-perfect conditions. Starter fertilizer, when used correctly, helps ensure that seeds have everything they need to develop into healthy, high-yielding plants, especially when conditions are not ideal for planting.

Before choosing a fertilizer, a soil analysis is recommended. The results will enable the selection of a fertilizer with the correct nutrient combination for that soil.



Viper ® II on fertilizer bar on planter

Both conventional and no-till operations experience cool, wet springs that slow the ability of the seed to develop an extensive root system. This means that only a few roots are responsible for gathering enough nutrients to sustain the seedling during crucial early-growth stages. Even in fertile soils, this can be difficult. Starter fertilizers placed in the optimal location gives young roots access to needed nutrients.

No-till operations have the additional challenge battling through residue. While residue has many proven environmental benefits, fertilizers applied only to the surface settle on residue and therefore move through the soil slowly. Residue also insulates the soil, keeping it cool and wet longer—tying up nutrients. A band of starter fertilizer provides an immediate nutrient supply to seedlings.



Unit mount fertilizer coulters with optional Residue Manager

Starter fertilizer is another alternative to broadcast fertilizer application, that shows great results. Broadcast fertilizers accumulate near the top of the soil, leading to nutrient stratification. Since nutrients such as phosphorous and potassium do not move well through soil, the plant roots need to be very close to the supply to take advantage of it. Starter fertilizer applied at the correct level put the nutrients in proximity to the roots, an effective method to develop strong seedlings. In short, making the one-time investment to equip an operation to apply starter fertilizer makes better use of fertilizer dollars.

Most research shows that optimal start fertilizer placement for corn and sorghum is two inches beside and two inches below the seed. For forage crops, it is one inch directly below the seeds.

The key to successful starter fertilizer use is in the correct placement. Companies like Yetter Manufacturing Company offer a complete line of fertilizer application equipment to ensure that producers use less fertilizer, save money, and facilitate high yields. All models allow for depth and down-pressure adjustments to satisfy specific conditions.

Recently introduced injection kits for coulters enhance their application tools. The injector has an exclusive design that allows the tip to pivot and aim a fertilizer stream directly at the trench cut by the coulter, ensuring pinpoint placement, and eliminating the chance of splashing.

A one-time investment in start-fertilizer application equipment will quickly provide a return on investment for producers. Placing starter fertilizers when planting have results that go beyond making better use of fertilizer investment and ensuring young plants have access to nutrients.



Coulter and
fertilizer set-up

These healthy plants tend to grow taller more quickly and compete better with weeds. Fast-growing young plants are also more resistant to insect and disease attacks. As more roots develop later in plant life, they too encounter the fertilizer, resulting another boost. Corn plants that received starter fertilizers produced drier corn at harvest time. And most importantly, starter fertilizers result in increased yields.

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Yetter Manufacturing Co., Inc.
109 S. McDonough
Colchester, Illinois 62326
Phone: 800-447-5777
FAX: 309-776-3222
www.yetterco.com
E-mail: info@yetterco.com



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