

Planning Fertilizer for 2013

Side-dressing gets a boost from new technology

Side-dressing fertilizer can be just what you need to give your crop a boost, despite the complexity it can add to your fertilizer management plan. New technologies have been cropping up in recent years to help you decide whether or not side-dressing makes economic sense for your operation.



Sixty-foot toolbars and high-speed anhydrous coulters make side-dressing nitrogen quicker and more efficient than ever.

The benefits of side-dressing

Side-dressing can be extremely helpful for growers, allowing them to provide timelier nutrient placement by responding to weather conditions.

Nitrogen tends to leach down through the soil and away from the roots after rains—side-dressing replenishes those needed nutrients for enhanced growth.

Side-dressing also ensures that nitrogen is there in the soil during critical growth stages when your crops need it most. Placing fertilizer beside the row where the roots can grow into the band allows plants to feed throughout the growing season. This is typically done between the V4-V6 stages.

When roots hit the fertilizer, there is a growth explosion. As more roots develop, they too encounter the fertilizer for an ongoing boost during critical growth stages.

How to make the side-dress decision

Because it cuts down on the amount of nitrogen that could potentially be lost due to rainfall, side-dressing can be economically efficient if planned properly. It is important to determine where and how much nitrogen to apply in-season.

Fortunately, there are many tools that can help you decide if side-dressing is needed or economically viable for your fields. Tissue samplings allow you to check the level of nitrogen in your crops and determine whether they are suffering from nitrogen deficiency. You can also use a crop canopy sensor

to analyze the leafy green parts of your crop. The canopy sensor will analyze the health of the plant based on the color green the vegetation is. It also measures the density, or amount, of the vegetation it detects. By keeping tabs on the health of your crop, you'll be able to tell when a side-dress application might be beneficial.



Side-dressing efficiently places nitrogen when the crop needs it most—either anhydrous application (top) or liquid application (bottom) are options.



Side-dressing has become a part of many farms today thanks to new products that increase efficiency and allow acres to be covered quickly.

New tools

Several new technological tools have recently become available that can aid in side-dressing. Ag Leader's OptRx crop sensors measure data on your crops in real time as you drive through your field, measuring the reflected light shown onto the plants. This data is then logged, mapped, and analyzed, telling you when plants need more or less nitrogen. This product is for use in corn and wheat production.ⁱ

Trimble's Greenseeker is another crop sensor that mounts to either a sprayer, boom, or toolbar. It is also available in a handheld version for scouting purposes. Trimble's product, like Ag Leader's, measures the vigor of your crop to give fertilizer rate application suggestions.ⁱⁱ There are many more similar options, including TopCon's CropSpec sensors.

Because side-dressing requires careful management to be a smart economic decision, these new tools can be an immense help when managing your fertilizer application—and even in deciding whether or not to side-dress at all. April is the perfect month to start thinking ahead to your fertilizer plan for the rest of the growing season.

Endnotes

ⁱ "OptRx Crop Sensor," Ag Leader Technology, <<http://www.agleader.com/products/directcommand/optrx/>>, accessed on April 17, 2013.

ⁱⁱ "GreenSeeker crop sensing system," Trimble, <<http://www.trimble.com/agriculture/greenseeker.aspx>>, accessed on April 17, 2013.

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