



May 4, 2011

AGRONOMY TOPIC OF THE WEEK

Fertilizing Soybeans

Soybeans are a crop that needs a large amount of attention and management, not just fertilizer. The first step to raising good soybeans is to test your soils, making sure your pH is 6.5 or above. Variable rate liming is virtually mandatory to correct pH levels. The second step to improving soybean yields is tile, or good drainage. Soybeans cannot tolerate wet, soggy soils, or better known as “wet feet”. Excessive moisture promotes many kinds of root disease and most common root rot; soybean roots need to breath.

Now let's say if you have good pH readings, well drained soils and your P & K readings are medium-to-high. What's next? In the last five years Central Valley Co-op's strip tests and yield data show that applications of potash and ammonium sulfate have given growers substantial yield increases, and returns much higher than their original investment. We are not talking about high rates of fertilizer. Applications of 100 to 150 pounds of potash and 50 to 75 pounds of ammonium sulfate are great levels to start with. The main thing to remember is not to apply high rates of nitrogen in the pre-plant and early stages of soybean development. Nitrogen applications should be well calculated events and done in the later part of the reproductive cycle.

Let's get back to managing your soybeans. We, as a Co-op, can make the right applications, but growers, you have to scout your soybeans constantly. You have to know your fields and their potential. White mold can steal your yield. Aphids and Bean Leaf beetles can slow the reproductive stage, and resistant weeds can reduce yield very quickly. So, when you are making plans to grow your next crop of soybeans, let's look at the potential your soil has, make the right decision on soybean variety, and also look at pH, fertility, and soil drainage. Let's plan to scout your field regularly. Go to test plot outings and ask questions about soybean seed treatments, foliar feeding, fungicides and trying to get an upper hand on white mold. Be aggressive with your soybean crop and it will pay dividends.