

Fall is Best Time to Soil Sample Fields

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Fall is the best time to soil sample fields as you remove crops. Fall soil samples will provide a baseline of nutrients present in your fields. Is there a need for lime, to correct pH? Plus, recommendations for crops to be planted the next few years. Soils are stable in fall and provide a good time sample when you may have some time.

Question, why soil sample in the fall?

Crops are harvested and it is just easier to sample fields.

Information will be available for you to plan next year's crop and provides an opportunity to purchase lime/fertilizer during the winter months.

If weather permits, fall applications of lime from soil test recommendations will reduce one job for next spring.

Updated soil test information to complete your Nutrient Management Plan during the winter months.

Question, why are soil samples recommended every 4 years?

One soil test is a baseline, by taking a sample every 4 years will provide a trend for the field.

The trend will show the results of lime and fertilizer applications related to crop removal over a four-year period.

Question, what is the correct method to soil sample?

One sample per 5 acres that contains a minimum of 10 soil cores from a soil probe or auger, which amounts to 1 core per ½ acre.

Random sampling, avoiding areas in the field that do not represent the field or sample area (dead furrows, wet spot, and fence line).

Review Extension bulletin A2100 "Sampling Soils for Testing", which is available at county's UW-Extension or Land Conservation office.

Question, what information is provided from a soil test?

A basic soil test report provides current pH, organic matter, phosphorous, and potassium levels of the soil.

Lime and fertilizer recommendations are provided for the crops you have selected.

Secondary nutrients (calcium, magnesium, zinc, sulfate, and boron) and micronutrients may also be determined for an additional cost per test.

Question, what does a soil sample cost and why should I invest in soil sampling?

A basic soil test cost, if you sample the field, \$0.40 per acre or hire a consultant/agronomist, \$.75 per acre per year (based on a sample every 4 years). Minimal when compared to many crop input cost.

Remember soil testing does have a cost, but guessing may cost more, so don't guess test.

In times of tight margins to manage a crop you must measure nutrients in soil and provide economical levels of nutrients to produce an economical crop that will return a profit.

You may participate in County, State, and Federal programs that require soil testing to receive cost share payments.

Fertilizer does have a cost, if under or over applying, soil testing will help manage fertilizer inputs.

In addition to recommending fertilizer inputs, you may also receive information to credit your "on farm" fertilizer sources (livestock manure, legume credits).

Question, why must I use a Wisconsin Certified lab?

Wisconsin certified labs have a set protocol to process soil samples. In addition, a Wisconsin lab will take into account the soil type and provide nutrient recommendations for the crops and from the information, you provide for the fields.

For information or supplies to soil sample on your farm contact your county agriculture educator or richard.halopka@wisc.edu or call the Clark County Extension office at 715-743-5121. One last note, please remember safety during your fall harvest.