Soil Tests Reveal Excesses, Not Deficiencies

When you get old, you talk about the past. And boy, have I felt old lately! When I started in Extension 24 years ago, reviewing garden and lawn soil tests was fun. Most all the test results revealed a shortage of phosphorus, the middle number on the soil test bag, and low soil pH. I would advise folks to apply limestone and suggest that they put on so many pounds of 6-24-24 per 1000 sq feet. That was the most common fertilizer available with high phosphorus. With phosphorus numbers in the single digits per acre and soil pH at 5.0, you could really work some miracles with a little lime and fertilizer.

Fast forward to today. Last year over 60% of all the lawn and garden soil tests processed here at the Extension Center showed high or excess levels of phosphorus and potassium. What changed over the last 24 years? My guess is that every year we are using 12-12-12 or 6-24-24 on our lawns and gardens. Since lawns don’t use much P and K, we got a buildup. Gardeners did pretty much the same thing. We didn’t remove much P and K in the vegetables or flowers that we grew so P and K soon became high.

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What does high P and K levels mean? Well, from the plants stand point, not that much. I am not aware of high P and K levels affecting plant growth. However, from a water quality standpoint it is a different story. High phosphorus levels in ground water have become a real environmental problem. More and more we are hearing that a significant contributor to increased phosphorus levels in water are the result of runoff from lawns and gardens. What should we do? First, understand that while nitrogen is the most part used in the year it is applied, phosphorus and potassium will stay in the soil and are used at a much lower rate. In fact, if you are not bagging the clippings from your lawn essentially you are not using any P and K. Therefore if your soil test is high for P and K, apply only nitrogen to the lawn. The rule of thumb is to apply one pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 sq ft. Make that application in early September and again in early November. In Jefferson County, I would avoid spring application as they often result in more lawn disease. We are seeing more fertilizers available with just nitrogen or very high nitrogen and very low P and K. This is good since years ago we were often just stuck with 12-12-12 or other high phosphorus fertilizers.

For the garden, if P and K test high, then you won’t need to add additional fertilizer at planting. Guide 6950 available here at the Extension Center can provide you with information on side dressing crops like sweet corn or tomatoes with additional nitrogen.

Big River Watershed Meeting to be Held on April 26th

Below you will find portions of a new release from Mike Alesandrini, URS, who is coordinating an effort to obtain input from citizens on how perhaps as much as $100 million will be spent to address lead issues on the Big River. If you live in the Big River watershed or if you are interested in this issue you will want to attend the meeting below. Certainly if you are a landowner on the Big River, this meeting should be important for you. Mike’s article explains more about the settlement with the mining company and how a master plan will be written to address these issues. Mike’s article is as follows:

Tens of millions of dollars will be spent on construction projects in St. Francois, Washington and Jefferson Counties to address lead in Big River.

Jefferson County Meeting:
Tuesday, April 26th, 7:00 p.m.
Hillsboro Community Center,
Jefferson County Fairgrounds
(Hillsboro)

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87th Annual Soils & Crops Invitation

We appreciate your interest and support for the 87th Annual Jefferson County Soils & Crops Conference. Please select one of the following registration choices and return to the Extension office by May 12th, 2011.

Name _________________________________

Number Attending _______________________________

—Return the registration form and pay $7.00 per person.

—Call the Extension Center at (636) 797-5391 to reserve your place and pay $7.00 per person at the door.

Remember, registration begins at 5:00 P.M. with the meal served promptly at 6:20 P.M. Once again, thank you for your support.

Dean Wilson
Agriculture & Rural Development Specialist
Big River Watershed Meeting to be Held on March 26th

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Contact information:
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University of MO Extension
(636) 797-5391 or wilsondw@missouri.edu

Meeting Agendas:
The inaugural meeting agenda in each county will include:
- Introductions of principals;
- Overview of the environmental, resource damages, public health and economic implications of lead contamination, as well as the potential work on/in the watershed;
- Explanation of the Master Planning Process with an overview of Outline that will serve as basis for ongoing group efforts and discussions;
- Discussion from agency representatives relative to their expectations from this process; and
- Discussion of next steps for each watershed group.

Why attend?
Due to a bankruptcy settlement with a former owner/operator of one of the "superfund" sites located in St. Francois County (ASARCO), tens of millions of dollars have already been set aside for construction work to be performed in the Big River Watershed. In a virtually unprecedented move, the government agencies responsible for developing and implementing plans to spend those dollars have requested input from the local citizenry at the very earliest stages of their respective planning processes. The agencies are seeking input about specific concerns, issues, questions and desires as much as a year earlier than the norm, thereby enabling local voices to share information with one another through draft form to the general public for comment. At best, public comments would generally provide the basis for subtle adjustments to those plans - plans in which the agencies would already be very heavily invested (lots of time and effort already spent by agency staff). For some, such a scenario might appear to undervalue the input of the general public in the plan development part of the process.

In the situation at hand, the agencies have seen fit to engage the general public much earlier than the norm, thereby enabling local voices to actually inform the planning process from the outset. In addition, the agencies have established a communication vehicle to share information with one another throughout the planning process. In regulatory terms, this is an extraordinary opportunity for the local citizenry to become involved and materially impact the policy decisions that will directly affect them.

It should be noted that the agencies retain their autonomy and statutory responsibility for making the determinations alluded to above. They are under no obligation to assimilate or incorporate elements of the Master Plan into their final plans. However, the agencies

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are clearly participating in the Master Planning process in earnest (funded by U.S. EPA through each County’s respective Commis-
sion/Council) and Master Plan outcomes would be expected, at the very least, to inform the agencies’ deliberations.

Relative to an anticipated timeline, it is expected that the “planning” stage of this process will last twelve to eighteen months (+/-). Following completion of the remediation and resource restoration plans by the agencies; the process of soliciting project proposals would occur; followed by the selection and negotiation phases of the process. Implementation might therefore commence 24 to 36 months hence (again, +/-). There are statutory requirements for construction to commence within a specified timeframe following approval of the agency plans.

My mom told me a bunch of jokes, but I can’t remember them. I think she just likes to get her name in the newsletter!

My cousin was telling me that he bought a futures market put on his grain and cattle to give him some price protection this year. He was complaining that the market has gone up since he bought his put. I attended the National Risk Management Conference in St. Louis last week. Dr. David Kohl, Ag Economist from Virginia spoke at the Conference. He warned producers not to get too comfortable with high prices. He noted a number of things that could result in lower markets, most beyond the normal supply and demand. His advice was for farmers to take protection every time they can and be prepared for a volatile market.

I looked at several wheat fields last week and they looked pretty rough. However, after that warm rain last Sunday night, they have really picked up. Seems our late cool spell in March kind of set everything back a few days.

Many years ago, the Jefferson County Ag News was called in on the carpet for publishing blonde jokes. Having learned my lesson, I’ll let you fill in the following. By the way this comes from Agronomy Specialist Rich Hoormann.

Microsoft and Google were auditing computer passwords and ran across this password from a “certain” person. The password was: “MickeyMinniePlutoHueyLouieDeweyDonaldGoofySacramento”. When this “certain” person was asked why the password was so long, they responded, “You said that it must contain 8 characters and at least one capital!?!?”

Dr. Kohl also suggested that farmers have additional operating capital in case the market turns lower. He reminded us of a famous Warren Buffet saying, “When the tide goes out, we find out how many people are naked!?!?”

Crystal City will have a farmers market this summer. It will be open on Wednesday evenings from 4-8 pm. It will open at the end of May. Several people have shared that they routinely sell out at Crystal City, so it might be a good place to sell this summer.

The recent economic downturn has resulted in many folks who have had trouble making their house payments. If you know someone who is behind on their house payments or facing foreclosure, share with them the following number, 877-422-9043. Free foreclosure counseling is available to Jefferson County residents.

This year, 2011, is the year for the emergence of the 13 year locust. The 13 year locust or cicada is a little smaller than their later season cousin, but noticeable louder. They should emerge in a couple of weeks and be mostly gone by June. The size of the locust crop for this year is yet to be determined. So enjoy the event because the next time the 13 year locust comes back, we will be celebrating the 100th Soils and Crops Conference.

And finally I have been undecided about putting this story in the prestigious AG News. However, my mom asked about it and she didn’t think it was that bad. Billy Bob and Cletus were buddies. Cletus went over to see Billy Bob and as he walked up to the barn he peeked inside and he couldn’t believe what he saw. Billy Bob was dancing around his John Deere tractor. Pretty soon he unbuckled one of the straps on his bib overalls. Then he was dancing around in his long underwear and T-shirt with a big tobacco stain on it. Cletus couldn’t stand anymore and busted open the barn door and asked, “Billy Bob, what are you doing?” Billy Bob was pretty embarrassed, but shared, “Me and the old lady haven’t been gettin’ along too good, so we went to the marriage counselor. He asked my wife what was wrong. She said, Billy Bob just doesn’t excite me anymore. The counselor turned to me and said “Billy Bob, you have to do something to a tractor!?!?”

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Agriculture & Rural Development Specialist

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