Soil Testing is a Valuable Resource

Soil testing is a process that measures the nutrients available in the soil to support plant growth. Using the soil tests results, fertilizer and lime recommendations can be made to ensure an economical level of fertility and soil pH are provided. Too much fertilizer is not an economically sound practice and inadequate fertility or pH quickly limits crop production. Soil samples should be taken every three to five years and should be collected at the same time each year. Wait at least three months after the application of phosphorus fertilizer, lime or manure before sampling.

The key to getting an accurate soil test report is collecting a representative soil sample for submission. A few ounces of soil are tested to determine the fertility of several million pounds of soil in the field. One sample should not include more than 20 acres. Divide larger fields into smaller similar areas based on soil type, topography and historical differences in management. Avoid “hot spots” that have the potential for higher nutrient concentration, such as an old homestead or livestock feeding area or an area where lime was piled in the past. Use either a soil probe or a spade to collect soil to a depth of six inches. Take 15 to 20 soil cores for each sample. Place them in a clean bucket, mix thoroughly and fill the soil sample box.

The MU Extension agriculture staff in the Northeast Region has started publishing a new newsletter. View the first edition on our website www.extension.missouri.edu/linn. The newsletter can be found by clicking on the word Agriculture on the left side of the page and scrolling down to the heading Agriculture newsletter, click on the words Volume 1 2013.

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