

## **ASK THE AG TEAM, for the week of December 9, 2007**

Fertilizer prices cause an increase in the number of soil tests –by *Wayne Flanary, Agronomy Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, Holt County*

Soil testing to determine if there are sufficient nutrients to grow crops has been around for many years. Fertilizers have been cheap in the past and now with the increase in prices, more and more growers are turning to soil testing.

There are some basics you should know about soil sampling. First, it is best to use a soil probe to take “cores” as this is much easier than other methods. Your fertilizer supplier or Extension office generally have one of these tools available.

When you take cores with the soil probe, these will be combined to make a composite sample that represents a particular part of a field depending on its size. We suggest limiting a composite sample to represent no more than 20 acres of a field.

When sampling, divide fields into areas that yield differently. For example, you may sample the hillside as one sample and creek bottom as another. This will help you determine how a field may need to be divided to be sampled. Look at the field and then draw a map so you can track what each sample represents.

Do not sample terrace cuts and eroded ditches. Your composite sample should represent the area of the field that you are sampling.

Another goal of soil testing may be to identify a problem area in a field, instead of a composite sample to represent the field; sample the problem area and good area of the field. This way you can contrast the two and determine if it is deficient in nutrients, has other limiting factors or has other issues.

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Census gives farmers a voice in their future--2007 Census of Agriculture coming soon

America’s farmers and ranchers will soon have the opportunity to make their voices heard and help shape the future of agriculture for years to come. That opportunity will come to their mailboxes in the form of the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

Conducted every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Census is a complete count of the nation’s farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The Census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures, and other topics. It provides the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation.

The Census of Agriculture provides information that is not available anywhere else – information that benefits agricultural producers and their communities in myriad ways,” said Gene Danekas, Director of the Missouri Field Office of USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). “For instance, policy-makers factor Census data into decisions concerning agricultural and rural programs. Community planners use Census to target needed services to rural residents. Companies rely on Census data when determining where to locate their operations. And farmers themselves can use Census data to help make critical decisions about their businesses,” he explained.

NASS will mail Census forms on December 28, 2007 to collect data for the 2007 calendar year. Completed forms are due by February 4, 2008. Producers can return their forms by mail or, for the first time, have the convenient option of completing the Census online via a secure web site.

We’re committed to making this Census the best count ever. It’s about the future of agriculture and rural communities in our state,” Danekas said. “Regardless of how large or small their operation or what products they produce, Missouri farmers and ranchers will help themselves and their communities by filling out the Census of Agriculture and returning it promptly,” he added. “We want farmers and ranchers to know: the Census of Agriculture represents their voice, their future and it’s their responsibility.”

For more information about the 2007 Census of Agriculture, please contact the NASS Missouri Field Office at (573) 876-0950 or visit the Census Web site at [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov).