



Media release

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Better use of science can cut fertiliser spending

Given the price uncertainty in the fertiliser market – other than prices are clearly going up – users will have to become more canny about where and how they apply fertiliser.

That's the message from Ballance Agri-Nutrients for everyone who makes their living in New Zealand agriculture.

The fertiliser cooperative says it is important to provide information that helps its customers make wise decisions, particularly in an environment of rising prices.

'We are all aware of the rising cost of fertiliser products, so users will have to change the way they apply fertilisers if they are to stay in business and sustain production levels,' advises Warwick Catto, Ballance Agri-Nutrients Head of Agro-Sciences.

The old one-size-fits-all approach must become a thing of the past, he says. To maximise cost effectiveness, an increased use of science is required to pinpoint what fertilisers to apply, in what quantities and in which paddocks.

'Farmers and horticulturalists really have to think about fertiliser application at a much higher level. It shouldn't be a blanket application over the whole farm or orchard any more. We have technical sales representatives who have been trained to help in this regard.

'With the increased cost of fertiliser, the economic optimum soil nutrient status has probably changed and some farmers will now be in a position to reduce inputs.'

He says the agricultural and horticultural industries should obtain more information on the nutrients in their soils before finalising a fertiliser programme.

'This means more soil testing, and more intensive analysis of the results. It could mean soil testing every paddock, especially for phosphorus, and applying differing amounts of P on each paddock to match the precise needs.'

And it will become increasingly practical to also examine the pasture species in each paddock, he says, or at least on a block level.

Mr Catto says phosphorus is still going to be the most expensive, and the most useful, fertiliser product available.

'Applying fertiliser accurately for optimum cost effectiveness depends on a number of key aspects, such as the pasture species present, water availability and drainage. It is not worth applying a lot of fertiliser to an old run-out pasture.'

In endeavouring to apply different rates of fertiliser on different paddocks, farmers can make use of a clutch of fresh research into phosphorus and nitrogen applications onto grass, and grass/legumes pastures.

'In general, farmers need to keep a high legume content in their pastures – as much as possible. Nitrogen is much cheaper to obtain that way than when applied out of a bag.'

'With crops, you need to know how much nitrogen is in the soil before the crop is sown. That means more deep soil testing before nitrogen is applied.'

Throughout, Mr Catto says it is vital that farmers and horticulturalists spend their fertiliser money wisely, and that means buying only proven soil nutrient products.

'Now is not the time to be taking risks with products that have little proven efficacy.'

To help farmers and horticulturalists come to terms with the new demands, Ballance technical sales representatives can be contacted on 0800 222 090.

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