



Media release

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### **Use science and don't delay fertiliser application**

Farmers who don't apply any fertiliser stand to lose significantly more from pasture production loss than it would cost to maintain soil fertility.

That's the message Ballance Agri-Nutrients chief executive Larry Bilodeau is giving to the co-operative's 18,500 farmer shareholders across the country, stressing that farmers should step up their scientific analysis to maximise the benefits from whatever fertiliser they can afford.

'I know I cannot be seen to be an impartial adviser,' Mr Bilodeau says, 'but we are concerned about the future productivity of farms where fertiliser applications have been halted completely for financial reasons. There is still great uncertainty in the farming industry, and no suggestion that farm finances are suddenly going to improve, but farmers should not hold off on all fertiliser.'

'With many farmers applying no fertiliser, or amounts well short of maintenance levels, it is our duty to point out that even reduced amounts of fertiliser will still pay dividends when backed by smart science and precise analysis from our Technical Sales Representatives.'

'While we can't totally rule out unforeseen events impacting on prices, our expectation is that there will be no significant price changes before the summer, so farmers should not delay application of spring fertiliser in expectation of further price decreases.'

Ballance will still review its prices on a three-monthly basis, he says, but the co-operative is not intending to change prices on its traditional 1 September review date.

Mr Bilodeau says it is particularly important for those farmers who skipped their usual autumn fertiliser application to know how best to minimise the potential pasture production loss.

'Now is not the time to skimp on agronomic (soil and pasture) testing on farms. In lean times more money should be invested in testing to determine what areas you can cut back on with little impact on your business, and what areas should be given priority.'

'Our technical sales representatives are skilled at adding value to farmers' operations. They are trained to help farmers maximise farm outputs while minimising inputs, regardless of whether this means a customer buys less fertiliser. I invite farmers to use them to ensure the right product is applied in the right place at the right time for the best economic return.'

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Warwick Catto, Head of Agro-Sciences at Ballance, says the challenge now is to get the most out of a sub-optimal situation by prioritising nutrient inputs, looking at sulphur needs first, then potassium and then phosphorus.

Mr Catto warns that sulphur could become a limiting nutrient much more rapidly than phosphorus, since it is more mobile and is lost more rapidly from the system. He suggests nitrogen should be viewed as the cost of buying additional feed, rather than as a fertiliser, as its effects are shorter term.

‘Used tactically, N-fertiliser such as n-rich urea is one of the most useful tools available to farmers to boost growth,’ says Mr Catto. ‘N-rich urea is generally going to produce the cheapest feed at 10-15 c/kg DM. On some soil types where spring S levels can limit N responses, a product like N-rich ammo, which contains sulphate sulphur, can give better responses than standard urea.’

The priority order for applying fertiliser to paddocks should be crops, then new pastures, then old pastures, he advises.

‘Where possible, farmers should use the results of agronomic testing to cluster paddocks into different management units according to their fertiliser requirements, and apply fertiliser only to those areas that need it.’

In lower soil fertility positions, fertiliser should be applied as early as possible to push for early spring growth.

‘Farmers will get the maximum benefits of any fertiliser investment this spring by getting it on the paddocks as soon as the conditions are right. There is nothing to be gained from waiting.’