

Some questions many producers face each year is “Should I fertilize my pasture? If so, what and how much should I apply?” How would you answer these questions? Although these questions may seem daunting at first, it *is* possible to develop answers to these questions that eliminate any guessing about the type and quality of fertilizer that should be applied. This, in turn, can greatly improve the quality of the pasture and of the cattle grazing it. This week we will discuss this tool and how it can be used in an operation.

In order to most efficiently improve the forage quality in your pasture, a soil sample should be taken first. Once tested, the soil sample provides the producer with data that reveals the actual quality of his pastures. This is important because the producer then has a better understanding of which nutrients are present or lacking. Additionally, this information is used to guide the producer in determining just how much, if any, of each nutrient should be applied. Knowing the exact type and quantity of nutrients that should be applied may also reduce the producer’s expenses. This is because a producer is not guessing about which nutrients should be applied, which may result in over applying or applying nutrients that aren’t even needed. Rather, he is applying the proper type and amount in order to promote healthy pasture development.

Although they can be taken at any time, soil samples are most useful if taken before each growing season. This allows ample time to evaluate the results and make any changes necessary to improve soil quality. Soil sampling on a regular basis is especially beneficial, as it can be used to track pasture fertility over an extended period of time. This helps the producer see the efficiency of his fertilizer program and whether or not he is getting the results he is aiming for, which in turn helps him decide if any adjustments should be made.

You will not have an accurate understanding of the quality of your pasture until you have taken a soil sample. Doing so now will allow plenty of time to take the next step in preparing for how you will properly manage the quality of your pastures. The grazing season is quickly approaching; are you and your pastures ready?

It is also important to think about the reproduction side of your operation at this time of year. If you have a breeding season that begins April 1<sup>st</sup> (recommended for producers in our area) the majority of your cows should be finished calving by the end of March. This is a good measure of reproductive efficiency, and is a good rule of thumb for spring calving producers. If this is not the case, there may be reproductive issues in your herd that should be addressed.

If you have any questions about either of the topics mentioned, please contact us.

Thanks,  
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