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Fertilizer Strategies for Increased Corn Acres

By Keith Reid, CCA-ON

The spring of 2007 is shaping up to be a real challenge for the fertilizer industry in Ontario. Not only are there half a million extra acres to plant, because of the small winter wheat crop, but these acres and more appear set to go into corn, which has the highest fertilizer requirements of any field crop. While it is unlikely that there will be fertilizer shortages, it is quite conceivable that the fertilizer, or the equipment to apply it, might not be available on the day you want it. You will also have challenges within your own operation in getting more corn acres planted within a limited planting window. Some advance planning can limit the risk of planting delays.

Take early delivery

You know you won't have to wait for delivery of fertilizer if you have it on the farm already. This is more suitable for some ingredients than others, but it makes sense that if you have storage for UAN that they are filled up well ahead of planting this year. Bulk granular fertilizers can

be blended ahead as well, but this needs to be done with caution, particularly if it is a starter mix that includes micronutrients. Some blends will absorb moisture out of the air and cake, creating headaches at planting time, so these are better blended just before they are needed.

Be Flexible

We may have a perfect planting season, when there is lots of time for everything to get done, but it is far more likely that some parts of the province will have uncertain weather. When this happens, everyone wants the application equipment on the same day, and there just isn't enough to go around. You can get around this by spreading fertilizer a few days earlier than you normally would, or by planting first and then broadcasting over the top. If the spreader truck is busy, but the sprayer is available, switching from urea to UAN for your nitrogen source is an option. If the hold-up is the availability of bulk starter fertilizer, switching to bags of an analysis that is close will keep you moving in the field,

and is preferable to leaving out the fertilizer completely.

Plant first, fertilize later

The options for side-dress (or top-dress) fertilizers are broader than most farmers commonly consider. Injecting anhydrous ammonia or UAN are the most common practices, but it is also possible to broadcast urea or UAN over the top of the crop. The limitations to broadcasting a granular fertilizer are the wheel spacings on the spreader, and the requirement for rain following application to wash the fertilizer into the soil. Granular fertilizer can be spread over the top of emerged corn any time the leaves are dry, so the fertilizer doesn't stick to the leaf surface and cause burning. Some growers have had good success using conventional sprayers equipped with streamer nozzles to apply UAN over the top of growing corn. The coarse stream rolls off the leaves, so leaf burn is minimal. Do not use regular nozzles to apply UAN to emerged corn, or the leaf burn will be extreme.



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There are over 500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) in Ontario. Each CCA has demonstrated their knowledge about Ontario crop production by passing the required exams. In addition, they have the crop advisory experience, the education, the commitment to continuing education and have signed a comprehensive code of ethics, which places the grower's interests first.

This industry driven program helps ensure that Ontario crop producers are well served by those providing their crop production advice. This article was written by one of those CCA's.