

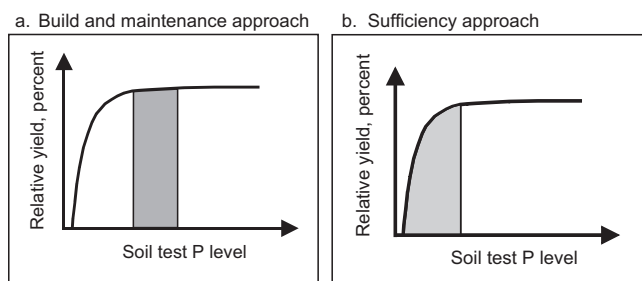


The objective of the buildup and maintenance approach is to build soil test P levels to at least the critical soil test level (or range) over the course of a few years, then maintain them with smaller, regular P additions (Black, 1993). **Figure 3a** shows the general area of a soil test calibration curve where soil test levels are usually managed.

**The buildup and maintenance approach attempts to minimize the risk of P limiting yields.**

However, because of the higher fertilizer rates required during the buildup phase, there is an initially higher risk that positive returns to fertilization will not be gained in the year of application. Adequate cash flow, available capital, and a longer-term financial strategy fit well with this approach.

**The objective of the sufficiency level approach is to keep soil test levels in the responsive range** (below the critical level) to assure a higher probability that positive economic returns to fertilization will be gained in the year of application (Black, 1993). **Figure 3b** identifies the range of soil test levels with a higher probability of crop response in the year P applications are made.

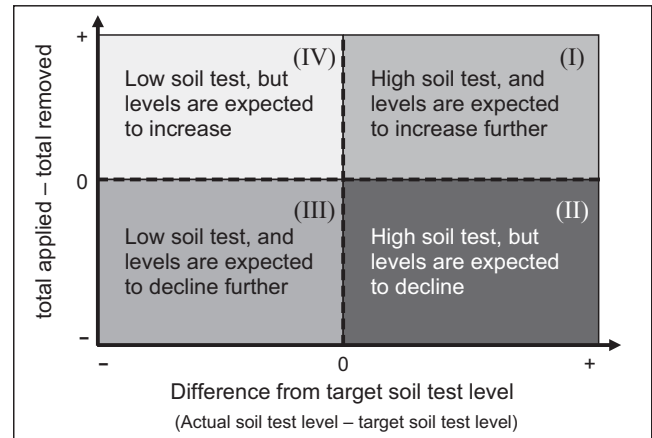


**Figure 3. Conceptual target soil test P ranges for: a) the buildup and maintenance approach, and b) the sufficiency approach.**

**The sufficiency philosophy attempts to reduce short-term economic risks, but carries a greater risk that P may be yield-limiting.** Usually, there is a long-term build component in these recommendations as well. Over several years, soil test levels are targeted to move to a range nearer the critical level. This approach is most appropriate when cash flow and available capital are limited, and/or land tenure is short-term. Nutrient budgets consider the balance between inputs and removals. A budget examines fields or field areas to compare how much P has been added and how much has been removed. Additions include both organic and inorganic sources. Removals include harvesting of crops, erosion, runoff, and leaching. For practical purposes, farmers and advisers can use a partial budget that examines both additions and removals estimated solely from crop harvest. This will capture most of the budget on areas that, by location, management, or both, are not at a high risk for the other losses mentioned above. For information on how to perform a P budget, visit the website: ><http://www.ppi-ppic.org/toolbox><. Click on “PKalc”.

**So what is an appropriate nutrient budget?** Should a budget show that more has been applied than removed, or should it show just the opposite? To answer this, you need a

recent soil test that is representative of the area you are considering. If your soil test is below the target level, then you will want your budget to have greater P additions than removals (quadrant IV, **Figure 4**). This positive budget is expected to increase soil test P levels. If your soil test is above the target level, then a negative budget (crop removal exceeding nutrient additions) is expected to decrease soil test P levels (quadrant II). Without a recent soil test, there is no way of evaluating the appropriateness of your budget.



**Figure 4. Evaluating historical, local P budgets with recent soil tests.**

**Summary**

Phosphorus should be managed to meet economic, agronomic, and environmental objectives. Building soil tests to higher levels is appropriate on land that is owned or under a longer term lease and where more operating capital is available. Managing soil tests at lower levels with higher probabilities of crop response to added P is appropriate on land with a short-term lease and where cash flow is limited.

Taking the time to evaluate planned versus actual production levels is necessary for making adjustments in the P fertility program. Examining historical, local P budgets along with recent soil tests can help farmers evaluate the effectiveness of their P management practices.

**By targeting appropriate P soil test levels and keeping a watchful eye on P budgets and soil test changes, farmers and their advisers can make the adjustments they need to come ever closer to optimizing their P inputs to meet their management objectives. ■**

**References**

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