

“If I increase my yields...?”



As traditional farming practices must give way to progressive high yielding technologies, so must the way farmers...and their societies...view the economics of increasing agricultural productivity. Twice in the past few weeks I was challenged by senior government officials in two different countries, in two separate conversations, regarding my contention that higher farm yields are needed to increase incomes for farmers...and that balanced, adequate fertilizer use is a necessary component. The responding view by both individuals was singular in nature – that increasing yields when prices are as low as they are now does nothing more than undercut the price farmers are paid.

Although analysis of this issue is crucial to a farmer’s decision making, it is imperative that the right questions be asked. Questions such as: If growing higher yields is the wrong thing to do, does lowering yields increase income? If the commodity price rises, how many consumers are excluded from buying? Farmers and their society have a very intimate association, one that is almost symbiotic in nature, whereby the health of one is dependent on the health of the other. In developing countries particularly, when agriculture thrives, so does society. And the converse situation is equally true.

As straightforward and to the point as I can be about answering the question, “If I increase my yields...?”, economic studies based on sound agronomic data show that improved productivity (yield per hectare of land) results from increased efficiencies – of both free and purchased inputs – and that is beneficial in every analysis of the facts. And, although we want ‘good’ prices for our products, we also recognize that more people consume more when food prices are low.

To the majority of the world’s population, agriculture is their life...their livelihood both physically and economically. As agriculture becomes more productive and more efficient, it breathes life into itself and the society it supports.

Is this being too optimistic? Probably, since government intervention is too often the short-term solution to commodity pricing and farmer income problems. Unfortunately, subsidies usually reduce farm efficiencies and minimize farmers’ options when it comes to making sound agronomic and economic decisions. Worse yet, they further entrench farmers into inefficient traditional practices. Should farmers increase their yields? Definitely yes, using all the skills and technology available so it is done effectively and efficiently.

Better Crops International,
published by the
Potash & Phosphate Institute/
Potash & Phosphate Institute of Canada



Printed on recyclable
paper with soy ink.

Dr. Mark D. Stauffer
Senior Vice President,
International Programs, PPI
and President, PPIC