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## A TREATMENT FOR MY GRAINS

**That's right — my grains, not migraines.** What treatment are we talking about? Some new inoculant or seed coating? Guess again. Here's a hint: it's a proven technology that tells you the nutrient content of your grain. Okay, so it's time to fess up. We're really just talking about grain nutrient analyses. So why the fuss? Haven't soil testing and plant analysis labs always offered these tests as a service? You bet. And that's the story. They have always offered them, but few people take advantage of them or make full use of the information they provide. So here are a couple of things to consider.

**First, there's sustainability.** Yes, this is an over-used and ill-defined term, but I'd hazard a guess that when most of us hear the word "sustainability," we think about managing our land responsibly so that it remains productive for generations to come. Nutrients are an important part of that vision. If we don't put back the nutrients we take out, soil fertility declines, leading to a host of problems if it gets too low. Knowing how much of each nutrient is removed in the grain is the first step in calculating how much to put back.

**The gene pool keeps changing.** If you've ever wondered why specific nutritional needs of hybrids or varieties aren't studied more at universities, you need only reflect on how long a specific genetic offering stays on the market. By the time a solid university investigation has taken place, the hybrid or variety has been replaced by the next generation. Is the nutrient content in the grain changing if there is more starch and less protein? Is drought tolerance affecting more than just yield? You can answer these questions for yourself just by taking a few samples and sending them to a quality lab.

**Interested in grabbing a grain sample?** Make sure it's done correctly. There are many university Extension publications with good advice. If you want a resource that can help you earn some Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) continuing education units for reading, go to this website: <https://www.certifiedcropadviser.org/>. Look for the self study quiz "Measuring Nutrient Removal, Calculating Nutrient Budgets."

**Become familiar with published nutrient removal rates.** These are commonly referred to as "book values." They are average numbers that can be used when you don't have sample analyses of your own. The same university publications that provide nutrient recommendations often have these numbers in them. If you can't find them, go to: <http://nanc.ipni.net/articles/NANC0005-EN>. Average "book values" have been assembled there.

**So if ever-changing genetics and sustainability have been giving you headaches, try this treatment for my grains and see if it helps.** You've got nothing to lose and everything to gain.

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