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## NUTRIENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOW CORN PRICES

**Corn prices are low and many producers are asking tough questions about their nutrient management programs.** Here are some suggestions for keeping fertilizer bills as low as possible without compromising the yield that brings much needed revenue.

**Account for nutrient supplies already in the soil.** Take advantage of what's already there. Soil test results provide the best guidance for deciding which nutrients should be applied and how much of them to use.

**Account for nutrient supplies on the farm or nearby.** If you have access to manure, whether it's on your farm or your neighbor's, use it as effectively as possible. Also, be sure that you know the nutrient content of the manure and the rate at which manure is applied, so you can calculate how much of each nutrient is being put on.

**Time nutrient applications for highest efficiency.** Spring nitrogen (N) applications provide N at a time closer to crop need, reducing the chances for N loss. However, spring applications can also carry higher logistical risks, since conditions are typically wetter than the fall. In some areas, fall N applications can be effective if they are made when soil temperatures drop below 50°F (10°C) and remain there. Nitrification inhibitors can also reduce or eliminate N losses from fall to spring.

**Place nutrients for greatest efficiency.** Generally, banded nutrient applications provide higher first-year recovery of applied phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) than do broadcast applications. Bands placed near the seed provide early season access to nutrients, while overall higher fertility levels in the bulk soil provide access to the larger root system later in the season.

**Use the most effective fertilizer technologies available.** Fertilizer technologies have come a long way. Look over options with your crop adviser. Nitrification inhibitors, urease inhibitors, and controlled release fertilizers are just some of the options available. Be sure to research these products thoroughly and examine university research that tests their efficacy. There are situations where these products provide an advantage. Know the conditions under which they have the best chances of making a difference.

**Allocate money to the right nutrients.** In times like these, many emphasize that N needs must come first. Before jumping to this conclusion, soil test levels of a field or field area must be examined. If the soil lacks other nutrients, crop response to N alone will be limited. If recommended rates of each nutrient cannot be afforded, it is best to band at least low rates of P and K near the seed as part of the N fertilization program. This balanced approach will maximize the effectiveness of all applied nutrients.

**When funds are limited and crop prices are low, it is paramount that nutrients be used as effectively as possible.** Effective use is possible only when informed decisions are made. Keeping soil test information up-to-date, using all nutrient sources available, and adopting nutrient management practices founded on proven scientific principles ensure the greatest chances for success.

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