

Friday 3 April 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Phosphorus testing: what you need to know

Farmers are increasingly looking to more efficiently manage inputs and consequent production risk. With fertiliser one of the largest expenses for growers, fertiliser application is under particular scrutiny. The once standard practice of applying blanket fixed fertiliser rates across a farm regardless of crop requirements has been replaced by the more targeted approach which uses soil testing to determine individual paddock requirements.

Phosphorus is an essential nutrient in cropping soils. The amount of phosphorus in a soil can be measured by taking a Colwell P soil test. It is important that farmers also know the tested soil's Phosphorus Buffering Index (PBI) which is the measure of a soil's ability to 'hold onto' phosphorus (soil testing for PBI every year is unnecessary as a soil's PBI remains constant). PBI figures can be used to determine a soil's Critical Colwell P (CCP). CCP can then be compared to the Colwell P result to determine phosphorus requirements using Figure 1 below as a guide.

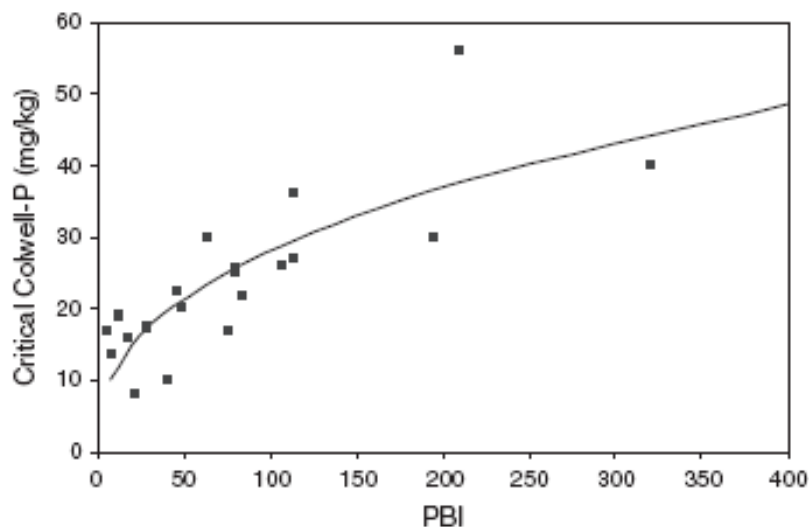


Figure 1 (Moody 2007)

For example if a soil's PBI is 50 its Critical Colwell P value needs to be roughly 20. If the soil's initial Colwell P is 20 or more, it is unlikely that the crop will have a response to phosphorus fertiliser. If the initial Colwell P is lower than 20, a response to phosphorus fertiliser is more likely.

There are many factors that may influence phosphorus levels in the soil including soil temperature and time of sowing; however determining Critical Colwell P is a useful tool for farmers to assist with phosphorus application decisions.

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