

May 7, 2019  
 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
 David Dugan  
 Extension Educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources  
 and Community Development

## Soil Testing is Worth the Effort

As we continue to wait for field conditions to improve so planting can take place, we are often looking at options to increase profits. If you are not looking for ways to increase your profits something may be wrong. Profits can be increased by improving your product and marketing it to get the top dollar. We have some control of that with forward contracting and such, but there are limits.

So if you are limited on what you can do to improve the marketing, the other end of the spectrum would be to decrease your inputs, right? No, that is not exactly right. It is easy to reduce inputs by planting less seed, using less fertilizer, or reducing feed for livestock. That is not the answer.

The answer is to be more precise with you inputs. Use the input dollars better. If you are feeding cattle, do a feed analysis so you are meeting the needs of the livestock to grow as cheaply as possible but as efficiently as possible.

The same can be said for producing crops, regardless if we are talking corn, soybeans, wheat or hay. The input dollars need to be used to best meet the needs for that production. The best way to realize this is through soil testing. Making sure that the pH is in the proper range so the fertilizer that is applied can be available to the crop is very important. Then finding out what nutrients are in the soil. There is no need to apply nutrients (they are not free) if you do not need them. An example would be applying phosphate if you have all that is needed already there.

Soil testing a field may take 15 minutes or so. The cost of sending the soil to the lab and the lab fees may be between \$10 and \$25 depending on what all is tested, but the basic test will cost about \$15. So for 15 minutes and \$15 you may be able to reduce your fertilizer bill, add nutrients that will improve your production and in the end increase your production and profit.

Hopefully you already soil test every 2 or 3 years, but if not, maybe I have convinced you to consider testing your fields. If you do not regularly test your soil, and you are not 100 percent sure how to properly take a soil test, call and ask, or go online and read for instructions. Factsheets are available from Extension and labs that perform the testing. The results of the test are only as good as the first step. The first step is collecting the soil to be tested. Do not let that be the weak link in the chain.

## How Good are Your Fences?

May is the time of the year that you find out just how good your fences are if you have livestock running against them. Fences may turn cattle all year long until the grass starts to green up and starts to grow. When the cattle begin to reach through, the fences are tested. One weak spot will show up and you will most likely find several animals have found their way to the fresh grass.



One of the more effective fences is electric fence. I recently read a post in the Beef Blog that discusses electric fences in detail. The post was written by Gallagher, and it states that the Gallagher company developed electric fence in New Zealand in 1938.

The post contained information about the safety and effectiveness of electric fences. Mature cows or bulls can be hard on fences. The strength and weight of these mature animals reaching for another bite of fresh grass can break wires or even posts. Bulls fighting is another story. Mature bulls often weigh a ton or more, and their strength is unreal. Two bulls can tear up several feet of fence in no time, however electric fence is an attitude adjuster.

The posts discusses several things about electric fences, how they work, how durable they are, how to choose a charger and how to properly ground the charger. The ground is often the weak link. Often installing the fence and charger will include installing insulators on the posts, connecting the charger and the ground. If you fail to use enough insulators, the fence will short out and will not perform well. It may provide some current and shock, but it will be weak if not zero. If you fail to connect the charger to the wire there will be no current. These two things are obvious when checking the fence with a tester. Some of the testers have features that include an arrow to point you toward any short plus the voltage.

The third thing is connecting the ground. You must have the fence properly grounded. In many cases connecting a wire to a steel post will ground it and make it work. The tester will show that the fence is working. If the conditions are good, there is plenty of moisture in the soil, the fence will work. However, if the conditions decline for whatever reason that single ground to a steel post will be the weak link in your fence. If you read the information that comes with most fence chargers it will illustrate how to properly ground an electric fence. Most will discuss the use of stainless steel or galvanized connections instead of copper. Also, it will discuss the number of ground rods, depth and distance between them to enhance the operation of the fence when conditions are not the best.

Most companies that make chargers recommend the use of 3 rods, about six feet deep and ten feet apart for optimal performance by the charger. If your electric fence is not working well, make sure the charger works first, but the lack of a good ground will be the problem more often than not.

I have been on farms where the bulls and cows were separated only by an electric fence made up a single wire. That convinced me how effective an electric fence can be if functioning properly.

Electric fence is used around perimeter fences to keep livestock in, but it is also very useful in grazing systems. Rotational grazing or strip grazing comes to mind. Rotation grazing can use temporary fence that restricts livestock from grazing an entire field and permits the producer to rotate livestock allowing the forages time to rest and recover. This practice has proven to produce more forages in a given year, thus more feed for grazing. Grazing is most likely the cheapest feed we have for our livestock.

### **Dates to Remember**

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| May 16    | Weed Identification at Western Brown HS Community Room at 7:00 p.m. Free and open to the public, brought to you by the Brown Co. Master Gardeners. |
| July 7-13 | Adams County Fair  |