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Topdress Alfalfa This Fall

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TOPDRESS ALFALFA THIS FALL

Good stands of alfalfa should be fertilized even though the alfalfa weevil is causing some concern. This fall, say after the last harvest, is a good time to topdress with phosphate, potash and boron fertilizers.

Kentucky's recommendations for maintenance fertilization on alfalfa fields have not changed because of the alfalfa weevil. Maintenance applications, as well as those at seeding time, should always be based on a soil test coupled with the treatment and cropping history. A soil test made at seeding time can serve as a treatment guide throughout the life of the stand. However, a test made later is a good guide also.

If soil tests made at seeding time are low or medium in available phosphorus and/or potassium, the initial treatments should be based on the recommendation in Kentucky publication Misc. 13C. These recommendations are adjusted to the differences in levels of available phosphorus and potassium that may occur. After these differences are taken care of in the initial application, maintenance fertilization is as follows:

Fields that need both phosphorus and potassium should be topdressed with 60 pounds of $P_2O_5$ and 120 pounds of $K_2O$ annually. Double these amounts can be topdressed every two years if this practice is preferred. Soils needing only phosphorus or potassium should get the above recommended amounts of the one that is needed. However, if neither phosphorus nor potassium are topdressed annually or every two years, soil tests made periodically to see if the proper level is being maintained may be advisable.

All alfalfa fields in Kentucky should be topdressed with 1.5 to 2 pounds of elemental boron annually either as a fertilizer borate or mixed with other fertilizers. Double this amount can be applied every two years on established stands.

The above recommended treatments should give a yield of about 5 tons of hay per acre in good seasons on land that is well suited for alfalfa. If farmers try for yields higher than this by using extra fertilizer, the phosphorus and potassium should be increased in the same proportions as recommended above.

Alfalfa grows best on soils testing neutral (between 6.7 and 7.0). Applying the proper amounts of limestone should be the first step in producing alfalfa. On moderately or strongly acid soils, the limestone should be applied a year in advance of seeding.

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