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Starter Fertilizer in Soybean

With any luck, corn planting will be in full swing by the time you are reading this. If so, you may also be thinking ahead to at least some degree to soybean planting. We can hope!

When we think about getting the starter fertilizer up and running on a planter, our focus is typically on use in corn. We're trying to get some level of nutrient near the root zone of that new plant while temperatures are cold and growth tends to be slow. For that reason, our response level in corn tends to be higher than in soybeans, even though soybeans remove significant amounts of nutrients per bushel of grain harvested as well.

Where soybeans do tend to (most consistently) respond to starter is where we are dealing with low soil test nutrient levels (or even medium soil test levels if high yield levels are attainable). This is particularly true if Phosphorous (P) is at low levels. We can also see some benefit to applied starter when we've had very high-yielding crops in the rotation so that optimum soil test levels can be maintained.

Banding fertilizer to the side and below the seed at planting is an efficient application method for soybeans. This method is especially useful in reduced-till or no-till soybeans because P and K have only limited mobility into the soil from surface broadcast applications. Fertilizer should not be placed in-furrow in direct seed contact with soybeans because the soybean seed is very sensitive to salt injury.

What about Nitrogen (N)? Research has shown that soybean seldom responds to starter N (small amounts) unless we are in irrigated, high-yield environments