INTERPRETATION AND POPULAR PRESENTATION OF DATA SHOWING THE ECONOMIC RESULTS OF FERTILIZATION

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In any discussion of the economics of fertilization or any other soil-improving practice, it is correct to assume that there is but one sound justification for the farmer's adoption of such practices, and that is profit. This is best proved by the fact that the only practices that have persisted and had widespread acceptance by the farmer are those that have resulted profitably to him.

In the past we have heard other reasons given for soil improvement such as "keep good soil good," "leave the land as good as we found it," "preserve the fertility for posterity," and others. These are commendable reasons for putting money and labor into soil fertility, but, unless the practices recommended to accomplish these more idealistic results pay their way and leave a profit for the farmer, wide adoption will not follow.

Even those who follow good soil fertility practices for the expressed purposes of "leaving the land as good as we found it," or "looking out for posterity," really do so for profit either in the form of personal satisfaction or by way of profit to those who shall later inherit or buy the land. Under the highly competitive conditions of farming during the past ten years and at present, probably few farmers and practically no agricultural scientists will advocate the use of fertilizer, or any other soil treatment, unless there is an affirmative answer to the question, "Does it pay?"

Data from fertility experiments and reliable field tests and demonstrations in perhaps 30 fertilizer-using states will show a crop return of $2 to $5 (in some cases much higher) per $1 spent for fertilizer. The most common rates of return are from $2.50 to $4 for $1 invested. That similar returns are actually realized under farm conditions is indicated by the experiences of some 48,000 farmers, as given in the survey made by The National Fertilizer Association, which indicate that they obtain crop increases valued at $3.54 per $1 worth of fertilizer.

From an investment standpoint, fertilization should return to the farmer the money spent for the treatment, pay for the extra labor of making the treatment and producing the crop increase, and allow for the element of risk, plus a fair profit.

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