

# PERSPECTIVES

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CROP QUEST AGRONOMIC SERVICES, INC.

## Crop Quest Services Will Benefit Your Bottom Line



by **Dwight Koops**,  
Regional Vice President  
Ulysses, Kan.

Thirty years ago, a crop consultant was a rare breed in agriculture. Back then, a consultant grabbed a foothold by scouting for hard-to-find insect species. To this day, there are still individuals who make a living just scouting insects.

As the industry evolved, it became necessary to offer services much broader than insect scouting. The return on investment of insect scouting alone can pay for a consultant's service, but the perceived return is no longer as high as it used to be.

Crop Quest manages all aspects of crop production, and the services are offered as a package. The major components include soil fertility, irrigation management, variety selection, pest scouting, tillage systems, record keeping and all the recommendations involved with these services.

While each of these services has proven to pay for themselves, the value comes in the package. Independent studies show that the value of a consultant's service returns at least six times the cost. Utilizing a comprehensive service like Crop Quest offers, will typically have a much higher return than that. It is very common for one timely recommendation to make a 20- to 30-bushel difference in yield.

Technology has caused the consulting industry to evolve along with it. Pesticides have become much more specific and concentrated. Biotechnology has added complexity to production decisions.

Crop planning is becoming the center piece of consulting. It is necessary to build an entire year's plan based on a variety or hybrid. GMO traits in seed force consultants and producers to plan all the inputs for the crop year around it. Once a crop plan is created for each field and a crop budget is attached to the plan, the next step is to execute the plan during the season.

This approach has led our customers to utilize our services on all their acres, instead of a portion of the acres.

When an agronomist looks at the whole farm, better decisions can be made, because we can better take into account crop rotation, soil moisture conditions, water availability, future cropping plans, pesticide residuals, etc.

Our customers are telling us that a comprehensive approach to consulting is what they are looking for. They need a 'go to' resource, and are more comfortable asking questions about any field on the

*Continued on page 3*

## Seeing the Value of Fall Soil Tests



by **Jim Gleason**,  
Regional Vice President  
St. John, Kan.

With fall harvest underway, it is time to make plans for the coming season. A big part of those plans center around the fertility needs of the crop that you will be planting. The first place to start is by having the soil sampled and sent off to a soils laboratory to be analyzed. The results of this test will then need to be interpreted to make a fertility recommendation.

What do the numbers mean? Which ones do I pay attention to? These are two very common questions. Soil pH is usually the first bit of information on the test report. It tells how acidic or alkaline the soil is. A number below 7.0 is acidic. If it is under 6.0, it may be time to start thinking about an application of lime. If it is over 7.0, the soil is considered to be alkaline or basic. If the reading is above 8.0, the field can be referred to as 'high pH.' The pH of the soil affects how available the other nutrients are to the crop. It also can affect how the herbicides work or persist in the soil.

Nitrate-nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium are the other bits of key information that should be reviewed on the report. Other elements, like zinc and magnesium, can also be found by the lab and are helpful to know on some soils. Each of these nutrients have a level or range at which they are considered to be present in sufficient quantity, that little or no response would be seen to any additional fertilizer. If the soil test is lower than that level, then applying fertilizer would be recommended to make up that difference.

By knowing what the soil test values are in your soil, your Crop Quest agronomist can interpret the report to tell you how much fertilizer you will need to apply to the field to grow the crop that you are planning.



# QA



by John Reh,  
Division Manager

**Q** Do I have nematode problems in my soybeans or corn? If so, what should I do about them?

**A** Nematode problems in both corn and soybeans are serious, and limit or reduce yield.

Nematodes are small, parasitic roundworms that feed on and in developing root tissue. This causes stress to the plants by limiting root development, as well as limiting moisture and nutrient uptake.

Being stunted, stressed and low-yielding for no apparent reason often characterizes areas in soybean and cornfields that have nematode problems. The best way to determine if nematodes are a problem is to take soil and root samples. This sample should then be sent to a lab that is set up to analyze and identify nematodes. Nematodes in cornfields can be sampled almost anytime during the year, except when the ground is frozen. Nematodes in bean fields need to be sampled during the growing season.

Soybean Cyst Nematodes (SCN), due to their size, can be identified with the naked eye. However, for control management reasons, you

need to know the race of SCN. This identification process needs to be done in a laboratory.

Managing nematodes is basically managing their numbers. Total control is not an option since they exist naturally in all soil types.

To manage nematode problems in corn production, there are a couple of options. By far, the best thing to do is to rotate out of corn to a broadleaf crop, such as soybeans, for at least one year. Another option is to use a soil insecticide such as Counter CR or Furadan 4F at planting time. The use of soil insecticides can be inconsistent at times.

To manage nematodes in soybeans, you have a couple of options as well. Again, the best plan is to rotate out of soybeans to a grass crop, such as corn or milo, for at least one year. With SCN, there are varieties that are resistant to certain races. Planting a variety with resistance to the known race of SCN that is present has worked well.



## Early Commitment Improves Crop Planning Decisions



by Ron O'Hanlon, President  
Member, National Alliance of Independent  
Crop Consultants, CPCC-I Certified

Cash flow is a phrase that has meaning to anyone in business. Maintaining an adequate cash flow in order to meet financial obligations is critical to the success of that business. However, business cash flows can vary from one organization to the next, and it takes planning ahead to ensure its success.

Crop Quest agronomists will be asking current clients and potential clients, over the next few months, for their commitment to continue or to begin using our agronomic service program on their farm. Since Crop Quest is a full-time crop consulting company with 71 full-time, professional agronomists and an office staff of four to handle the administrative work, cash flow is critical not only to meet purchases for business needs, but to pay adequate salaries and benefits to maintain a highly trained, college-educated staff that can serve our clients to help reduce risks and ensure a greater chance of their success.

Even though Crop Quest has to work and plan for our own cash flow needs, which allows us the ability to provide a

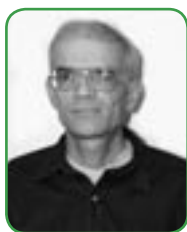
higher-quality service with a good return on investment to the clients, the agronomists must also keep their client's cash flow needs in mind.

Early commitment has obvious benefits to Crop Quest, as stated above. But more important, early commitment has benefits to the farmers/clients. Signing contracts early encourages a quicker turnaround in soil sampling fields and returning fertilizer recommendations for fall fertilizer applications. The agronomist can also spend more time in developing crop planning programs so the farmer can "early book" pesticides and seed orders. "Early booking" usually entitles farmers to discounts, greater product and seed availability, and the opportunity to prepay expenses, if needed, for tax reasons. It allows the agronomists more time visiting with their clients about overall cropping plans and multiple year rotations, instead of spending time trying to get contracts signed. With the delayed billing program Crop Quest has used for years with their established clients, early commitment has many benefits without hampering a farmer's cash flow.

When your Crop Quest agronomist approaches you this fall for that commitment to next year's services, give him a thumbs up and sign your name to the contract, so he can spend more time soil sampling and planning ahead for your next crop growing season.



# The Value of Phosphorus in Crop Production



by Stan Schield,  
Division Manager

Phosphorus, as one of the three primary nutrients for crop production, is second only behind nitrogen in quantity used for most crops grown in the High Plains. Contrary to nitrogen, the quantity of phosphorus in the soil can be several thousand pounds per acre, but the amount that is available for crop use is often only about 1% of the total.

Often, when phosphorus is limiting, yields can suffer without any obvious visual plant deficiency symptoms, making field diagnosis difficult. Only by a properly conducted soil test can phosphorus production problems be properly determined and a fertilizer application program be established.

Depending on the soil pH, much of the soil phosphorus is found in forms relatively unavailable for crop use. Iron, aluminum and manganese form unavailable phosphorus compounds under low pH, and calcium and magnesium under high pH. Soils contain many of these compounds naturally, but the real problem occurs when additions of phosphorus fertilizers to the soil also result in the formation of these unavailable compounds. Over time, some of the phosphorus from these forms gradually becomes available for crop use, but often this process is not rapid enough to supply crops adequate amounts for top production.

Several management options in terms of type of fertilizer placement can be used to help overcome the soil's ability to limit phosphorus for crop production. The type of tillage system being used by the producer, whether it be no-till, strip-till, ridge-till or conventional tillage, does affect which placement system is best suited to maximize phosphorus use by the plant.

While conventional tillage permits nearly any placement system to be used, the various reduced or no-till systems require some type of banding or soil-injected placement to maximize phosphorus fertilizer use.

Any application system which minimizes soil contact with applied fertilizer will reduce the soil's ability to retain phosphorus in forms unavailable for crop use. These would include a fertilizer band applied at planting either in direct seed contact or placed a short distance away from the seed. If the phosphorus will contain significant nitrogen, potassium or sulfur nutrients, then this placement will need to be separated from the seed to avoid germination or early seedling growth problems. A second type of band application which could be used would be a deep-placed or knifed-in system, placing the phosphorus below the soil surface. This system is best applied prior to planting and can be positioned several inches away from where the seed will be placed.

Regardless of the type of application system used with phosphorus, the nutrient must be positioned so that plant roots can access the fertilizer. Phosphorus moves very little in the soil after application so that surface applications often can result in reduced yield responses, unless the fertilizer is mechanically incorporated. A couple of exceptions to incorporation would be on very sandy soils which permit limited movement of surface-applied phosphorus into the root zone, and on alfalfa which has the ability to take up nutrients from the crown area.

Most of the yield increase from applied phosphorus comes very early in the plant's growth period. This requires that the phosphorus be applied either prior to or during planting. Side-dress applications might be considered only if the soil phosphorus is very low and if the application could be accomplished very early in the plant's growth.

## Crop Quest Services Will Benefit Your Bottom Line

*Continued from page 1*

farm, instead of just specific fields. These benefits enhance the value of a consulting service much more than the conventional services that growers were once used to receiving.

Probably the greatest benefit a consultant has to a producer is 'timing.' You can come up with a great plan with all the proper inputs in place, but if treatments are delayed or planting dates aren't matched with hybrids, greater damage is done to the bottom line than any other decision made.

Our agronomists also add value by adapting to the expected changes to the plan as the season progresses. Seldom are plans executed to perfection, so it is important for the producer and the agronomist to be prepared for this.

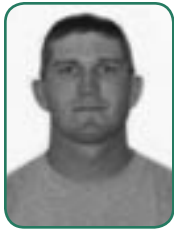
All in all, it makes sense for producers to fully utilize Crop Quest's services on their entire operation. Very strong relationships are built between producers and agronomists

when they work as a team to attain the results that will improve the bottom line of the operation.

We encourage you to visit with your Crop Quest agronomist about our 'whole farm' approach to consulting.

## Get Updated!

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## Southwest Kansas Crop Quest Consultant Gareth Havel, Following a Family Tradition

For Gareth Havel, working for Crop Quest is a family tradition and part of an ongoing learning process that he shares with farmers in southwest Kansas.

Garet's brother, Grant, works in the Silver Lakes district, in Waterville, Kansas. Garet began working with Crop Quest as an intern when he graduated from high school. He enjoyed the work so much, he changed his college major from animal science to agronomic crop science.

When he graduated from Fort Hays State University, Garet began working full time for Crop Quest. "I grew up on a farm, and finding easier, more cost-efficient ways of doing things was a way of life. On this job, I learn something new everyday, and I enjoy building relationships with farmers and helping them find better ways to produce a crop," says Garet.

Though most of the crops that he currently works are similar to the crops grown on the Havel family farm in north central Kansas, many of the growing conditions are different.

"Using drip irrigation to get corn up and growing has been an interesting challenge," he notes. "This is my first full year here in southwest Kansas, and the amount of rain we have had is just unheard of in this area of the country. It's all part of why I like this job so much – the growing conditions are always different and there is always something new to learn."

Rainfall in southwest Kansas has been unusually plentiful this year, reducing the amount of irrigation water used in some areas, and also creating some rarely seen disease problems. "We have seen gray leaf spot on corn nearly to treatment levels and that's almost unheard of in this area, but it's something new to look out for, and part of my learning experience," Garet concludes.

"We are fortunate to have both Garet and Grant Havel working for us," noted Dwight Koops, Crop Quest Regional Vice President. "Garet grew up in our company as an intern, and he is putting his experience and education to good use to serve our farm partners in this area," Koops concludes.



## Technology Management is the Key For Crop Quest Consultant Chris Oborny

"When I first started working as a crop consultant, I asked one of my farmers why he hires crop consultants – why not do it himself," notes Crop Quest Agronomist Chris Oborny.

Oborny continues, "The grower told me he wasn't worried nearly as much about scouting for weeds, bugs and diseases as he was about finding the best methods to manage these problems. 'Keeping up with the technology to manage agronomic problems is why I hire consultants,' he said."

Chris Oborny learned firsthand about decision making in farming. He grew up on a farm near Rush Center, Kan. Figuring out how to make a living producing wheat, milo and

alfalfa on both irrigated and non-irrigated land, and running a small cow-calf operation was part of growing up for this Crop Quest consultant.

After attending junior college in Dodge City, he went on to earn a B.S. degree in agriculture from Fort Hays State University. Oborny worked three years for an independent crop consultant before joining Crop Quest earlier this year, and is now working out of the Dodge City, Kan. office.

"Learning new things, keeping up with changes in technology and trying to figure out how to apply that technology to help growers make management decisions that will make or save them money – that's exciting," Oborny concludes.



### Mission Statement

Crop Quest is an employee-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality agricultural services for each customer. The quest of our network of professionals is to practice integrity and innovation to ensure our services are economically and environmentally sound.

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