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Fertilizer Efficiency In Agronomy: Best Practices For Sustainable Use

Shobha Malviya

Department of Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry, Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia Krishi Vishwa Vidyalaya, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, India.

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Abstract

Fertilizer efficiency is a cornerstone of sustainable agriculture, aiming to maximize crop yield while minimizing environmental impact and resource wastage. Inefficient fertilizer use contributes to nutrient leaching, greenhouse gas emissions, and water pollution, challenging both food security and environmental health. This article explores the key concepts and determinants of Fertilizer Use Efficiency (FUE), including agronomic, recovery, physiological, and partial factor productivity measures. Factors such as soil properties, fertilizer type, application methods, crop variety, and climatic conditions significantly influence FUE. Best practices like the 4R nutrient stewardship (Right Source, Rate, Time, and Place), Integrated Nutrient Management (INM), use of Enhanced Efficiency Fertilizers (EEFs), soil testing, and decision-support tools are highlighted for improving fertilizer efficiency. Enhanced efficiency not only boosts farm profitability by reducing input costs and increasing yields but also aligns with environmental goals such as reducing emissions and nutrient runoff. Adopting these practices is essential for sustainable agricultural systems and global food security.

Introduction

In modern farming, the application of fertilizer can help with the growth and development of agriculture plants. Yet, inefficient use of fertilizers not only lowers farmers' economic returns but also gives rise to environmental problems such as nutrient leaching, greenhouse gas emissions, and water eutrophication (Tilman et al., 2002). The world faces growing food demand and pressure on natural resources. Therefore, improving fertilizer use efficiency (FUE) has become an important goal in agronomic research and practice.

Fertilizer efficiency is how much of your applied nutrients are actually absorbed by and used by crops. Having a high FUE is vital for increasing crop yields and reducing environmental damage. This article will look into the agronomic principles of fertilizer efficiency, the important factors influencing fertilizer efficiency and the best practices for sustainable and productive fertilizer management.

Understanding Fertilizer Use Efficiency

The efficiency with which fertilizers are utilized is defined as the amount of crop yield or nutrient uptake relative to the nutrient applied. It can be categorized into several components.

- Agronomic Efficiency (AE): Increase in yield per unit of nutrient applied.
- Recovery Efficiency (RE): Proportion of applied nutrient taken up by the plant.
- Physiological Efficiency (PE): Yield increase per unit of nutrient absorbed.
- Partial Factor Productivity (PFP): Total crop yield per unit of nutrient applied.

This data allows agronomists to check how well nutrients are being utilized, which helps formulate site-specific nutrient management strategies (Dobermann, 2007).

Factors Affecting Fertilizer Efficiency

There are a number of biophysical and managerial problems which affect the fertilizer use efficiency.

Soil Properties

The availability and mobility of nutrients in soil are significantly affected by its texture, structure, pH, organic matter content and moisture availability. Sandy soils are typical low nutrient retaining soils. Acidic soils may restrict the availability of phosphorus (Fageria, 2009).

Fertilizer Type and Formulation

The chemical form of the fertilizer (granular, liquid, slow-release or enhanced-efficiency) affects this solubility and uptake rate of nutrients. Controlled-release fertilizers and inhibitors such as urease and nitrification inhibitors synchronize nutrient availability with plant demand.

Time and method for application

By timing applications according to peak crop uptake periods, we can minimize losses. Techniques like banding and side-dressing for placement help make nutrients more accessible.

Crop Type and Variety

Crops absorb nutrients differently due to variations in their root architecture. The use of efficient genotypes improves nutrient recovery and productivity.

Climate and Irrigation

Nutrient dynamics are influence by rainfall, temperature and irrigation. Rainwater may cause leaching while drought conditions may limit nutrient uptake because of low transpiration.

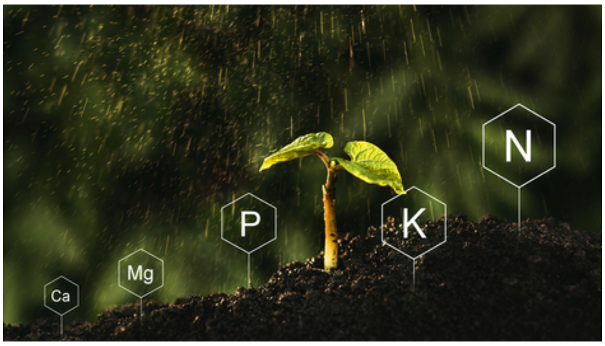
Best Practices for Enhancing Fertilizer Efficiency

Agronomists recommend a group of integrated practices for sustainable and efficient use of fertilizers.

The four Rs of nutrient stewardship

The principles of 4R i.e. Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time and Right Place (IPNI, 2012) are essential for precision nutrient management. By applying these principles, nutrients will be delivered according to plant requirements and the environment.

- Right Source: Matching fertilizer type with crop and soil requirements.
- Right Rate: Using soil tests and crop models to determine optimal nutrient doses.
- Right Time: Timing applications to coincide with active root growth.
- Right Place: Positioning fertilizers where roots can readily access them.



Integrated Nutrient Management (INM)

INM (Integrated Nutrient Management) refers to chemical fertilizers mixed with organic matter (comprising compost, green manures) plus bio-inputs with an aim of improving soil fertility and increasing the nutrient cycling. In order to improve long-term soil health, it lessens reliance on synthetic inputs (Sanginga & Woomer, 2009).

Utilizing tools that support decisions and soil testing

Different digital agricultural tools help in farm management are helping in fertilizer use optimization i.e. Nutrient decision support system, remote sensing, and site-specific management software. Soil testing on a regular basis gives data to calibrate recommendations based on actual availability of nutrients.

Use of High Efficiency Fertilizers (EEFs)

Slow-release and stabilized fertilizers (or enhanced efficiency fertilizers [EEFs]) reduce losses and increase synchronization. According to Shoji et al. in 2001 many tools and techniques come handy to minimize nitrogen loss caused by urea application.

Rotate Crops and Manage Residues

Using legumes in crop rotation helps to enhance the availability of nitrogen naturally. When a farmer manages crop residue, he is doing recycling of nutrients and improvement of organic matters of the soil.

Environmental and Economic Implications

Enhancing fertilizer efficiency helps both the environment and economy. It helps in less leaching of nitrate to water bodies, reduces nitrous oxide emission (a potent greenhouse gas), and supports biodiversity in agricultural landscapes. The efficient use of fertilizers saves on inputs, reduces costs, and increases profit margins through a greater yield per unit of nutrient input (Zhang et al, 2015).

In addition, policy instruments and extension services that promote efficient fertilizer use contribute to achieving the SDGs on zero hunger, clean water and sanitation and climate action, among others.

Conclusion

Fertilizer efficiency is an important part of sustainable farming practice Scientists and farmers can improve nutrient use efficiency through scientific methods such as the 4Rs, integrated nutrient management, and use of precision technologies. Achieving such goals improves the yield of crops while improving environmental quality and improving resilience on farm. With the growing demand for food and sustainability, efficient use of fertilizers will be key to innovative and responsible agricultural systems worldwide.

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