



Fertiliser Decision Tools: empowering farmers to make the change



Western Dairy embarked on a proactive project to demonstrate leadership and show industry-led practice has the greatest capacity to promote best-practice fertiliser use.

Wind the clock back in time and look at the land management formula of the day for dairy farmers: 'increased fertiliser = increased grass = increased profits'.

“Giving farmers the confidence to change their traditional practices based on their own interpretation of their soil results... allows them to make decisions themselves rather than relying on someone else.”

Agronomist, Sam Taylor

With most dairy farmers adopting this approach on their farms, you can only imagine the amount of money inefficiently spent on fertiliser for no return on investment, not to mention the level of nutrients entering our waterways and having a major impact on water quality.

The Government of Western Australia has been concerned about the impact of over-fertilising and the broader impact within catchments in the South West, and has responded with the Fertiliser Partnership.



The Government of WA has responded to concerns about over-fertilising with the Fertiliser Partnership.

Western Dairy embarked on a proactive project to demonstrate leadership and show industry-led practice change has the greatest capacity to change behaviours to reverse this trend and promote best-practice fertiliser use and more specifically soil testing and fertiliser application rates.

A Partnership Approach

Joining forces, Western Dairy, the South West Catchments Council (SWCC) and the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) developed two tools to aid the delivery of best-practice fertiliser management.

1. A nutrient management ready reckoner that allows the user to refer to their soil tests/maps of their farms and get an immediate signal of whether more or less fertiliser is needed. This tool is known as the SPANA – short for the Soil Productivity and Nutrient Assistant. Cleverly shaped like a spanner, the tool is a colour coded ready reckoner with Phosphorous on one side and Nitrogen on the other, the tool is all about risk not rates.

2. The second tool complementing the SPANA is a five minute DVD on fertiliser facts – intended as a short guide to best-practice fertiliser management from the mouths of farmers experienced in whole farm soil testing. The focus of the DVD is on economic and environmental benefits through testimonials of farmers about the advantage of whole farm soil testing and strategic fertiliser use.



There are economic and environmental benefits to whole-farm soil testing and strategic fertilizer use.



Above: the SPANA ready-reckoner and the companion DVD.

Encouraging Change

These two tools are structured around delivering three main messages:

1. There is an economic advantage in re-balancing nutrient application according to soil types and usages.
2. There is a threat of legislation linking dairy activities that are perceived to have negative off-farm environmental risks, especially in environmentally sensitive areas.
3. The dairy industry is considered by community and government to have a significant role in reducing the amounts of Phosphorous and Nitrogen in the natural landscape.

Agronomist, Sam Taylor was involved in the project and spoke about the value of the nutrient management tools. "Giving farmers the confidence to

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The simple tools which empowered dairy farmers have produced win-win outcomes.

change their traditional practices based on their own interpretation of their own soil results, even if they have minimal skills in the analysis or interpretation of the data. It still allows them to make decisions themselves rather than relying on someone else's interpretation," he said.

In delivering these tools for dairy farmers, it became apparent that simple tools or aids to empower farmers are the way to go. Giving farmers the confidence to interpret their soil data can have major benefits, both to the economic returns on the farm and for the environment – a genuine win-win outcome.



Empowering Farmers

The success of this project continues to grow as the concept of developing useful tools to empower farmers to make changes to their practices takes hold.

The SPANA and DVD have been distributed across the South West Region and are embraced and promoted by leading fertiliser companies.

These tools complement an expanding initiative lead by DAFWA and part funded by Geographie Catchment Council and SWCC through State NRM and Caring for our Country funding to promote intensive on-farm soil testing and mapping. It is hoped this will eventually become standard practice across agricultural industries to guide fertiliser application decisions made by farmers in the South West Region and beyond!



The SPANA sends an immediate signal of whether more or less fertiliser is needed.



Farmers will find economic advantage in re-balancing nutrient application.



The SPANA and DVD have been distributed across the South West Region.



south west catchments council

working together to make a difference today and
develop a sustainable environment for tomorrow.



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY

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