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Rice to Speak at Soil Health Workshop

Pick up just about any farm publication and you can likely find a mention somewhere in it about soil health. What exactly does soil health mean? It can be a tough term to define!

What we all can agree on is that there is a lot going on in the soil. Some of it we understand, some of it we don't! To help explain some of what we might not understand as well as we'd like, the Nemaha County Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, local Pheasant and Quail Forever chapters, and the Meadowlark Extension District are hosting a soil health workshop on Friday, January 8th, 2016. This year's featured speaker will be Dr. Chuck Rice, Kansas State University Distinguished Professor of Soil Microbiology in the KSU Department of Agronomy. He'll share his research findings in the areas of soil health, soil microbiology, and climate change to help explain some of what goes in to soil health.

The meeting will be held at the Nemaha County Community Building, 1500 Community Drive in Seneca, starting with registration at 8:30 a.m. and Dr. Rice's first talk beginning at 9:00 a.m. RSVP's are requested to get a meal count! Please do by Monday, January 4th to the Nemaha County Conservation District Office at 785-336-2186, Extension 110. For a full flyer, check out the Crops & Soils link at www.meadowlark.k-state.edu. Hope you can attend!

Ice Melt Products

This information will be all for naught if it doesn't get any more 'winter' than it's been lately! Better safe than sorry, though – especially when there's the potential for a slick sidewalk! So let's review the five main chemical deicers we tend to work with on a regular basis.

Our 'traditional' product is calcium chloride – and with good reason since it will melt ice to about -25 degrees F and doesn't typically harm plants unless excessive amounts are used. Just be cautious of the potential for the slippery, slimy residues it can leave on hard surfaces.

Sodium chloride (rock salt) is another option, though it's typically less desired. It's inexpensive and can melt ice down to approximately 12 degrees F, but it can also damage soils, plant roots and metals as well as cause serious plant injury when washed or splashed on foliage.

Urea (carbonyl diamide) is actually a fertilizer that can be used to melt ice. It is effective down to about 21 degrees F with much less corrosion potential than rock salt. You will want to work to avoid contamination of ground and surface water with the nitrates that result.

A newer product is CMA or calcium magnesium acetate. It's a combination of dolomitic limestone and acetic acid. It works differently than the traditional melt products. Instead it helps prevent snow particles from sticking to each other or the road surface. It has little effect on plant growth or concrete surfaces – that's a positive! Performance does decrease below 20 degrees F.

Apply any product in moderation to avoid plant or surface injury since plants, concrete, etc., can all be damaged by the products. When snow and ice can be physically removed, it is recommended that you do so rather than use a chemical deicer.