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Lime and Forage Stands

Most standard soil test results include a measure of soil pH and a corresponding recommendation for lime when needed based on the crop being grown. Research has long shown the value of appropriate pH levels for optimizing production, and while it's been standard practice to apply lime in field crops, forage crops shouldn't be ignored. Mississippi State University Extension forage specialist Rocky Lemus recently made these statements:

"Liming becomes a critical management practice to neutralize soil acidity, enhance nutrient availability and boost forage productivity,"

"Liming must be the first target of any fertility program before any other nutrients are added to the system."

The reason for the focus on lime focus by Dr. Lemus (and others) comes down to nutrient availability and crop nutrient use efficiency. Simply put, if we keep pH in an ideal range (it varies by crop and nutrient, but a goal would be around 6.0 and above), we help keep nutrients we *do* apply more plant available. When we venture outside of optimum ranges, the efficiency of our applications can be compromised. Essentially, we're applying recommended nutrients, but the plant can't efficiently utilize them to enhance production. That's not great when margins are good – but it can really hit the pocketbook when margins are tight.

With haying winding down and as we approach the back half of the grazing season, it's a good time to start thinking about what your soil fertility plan might look like for next season. A soil test is a great place to start and soil pH should be a focus. If pH levels are low enough that nutrient availability and efficiency could be a concern, a lime application may be in order. While that will come at a cost, there's also a cost to *not* addressing low pH levels. A soil test can help you get a first look at where to focus fertilizer dollars in 2027.

For more information on soil testing, drop me a line. Soil testing isn't complicated, but there are some small things you can do to help get the most out of your sampling and results.