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IN A NUTSHELL

Newsletter

February 24, 2006

Number 1

Fertilizing

Cost of nitrogen has become a major expense in growing pecans. It is time to think about the most efficient and cheapest way to put out fertilizer.

How to fertilize for the coming year can be a dilemma. This is likely to be an off year for many of the pecan orchards. Many trees in Pointe Coupee parish lost their foliage to caterpillars early in the season and then lost more leaves to hurricanes late in the season.

Trees that had a lot of their leaves blown off by hurricanes are likely to have a light crop this coming year. Trees that put out new leaves after the hurricanes have probably severely reduced their energy reserves and are likely to have little or no crop this year.

A split fertilizer application would probably be a good choice since most orchards are likely to have a light crop this year. Half of the nitrogen fertilizer should be put out in March and the second half can be put out in May if a good pecan crop develops.

Eliminating the second half of the nitrogen application if a light crop is present can reduce production cost and also reduce the potential of a very large nut crop being produced the following year which often results in poorly filled nuts and severe alternate bearing in following years.

A producing pecan orchard normally needs 100 to 150 units of nitrogen per acre. Traditionally, 100 units of nitrogen per acre are applied when leaf samples indicate nitrogen levels of 2.5% to 2.75%. For each 0.1% unit below 2.5%, an additional 10 pounds of nitrogen is added per acre.

Ammonium nitrate has been the traditional nitrogen source for pecan orchards in Louisiana. It loses little nitrogen to the air under Louisiana conditions and has been easily obtained and has usually been competitive in price. Ammonium nitrate is 33-34% nitrogen.

There have been some concerns about the availability of ammonium nitrate this year. Conversations with eight fertilizer suppliers in North and Central Louisiana indicated that ammonium nitrate in bulk was available and these suppliers had not received any word on new regulations or restriction for handling ammonium nitrate. Ammonium nitrate sold in bags may be less available.

Urea (45-46% nitrogen), anhydrous ammonia (82% nitrogen) and ammonium sulfate (21% nitrogen) are possible alternative nitrogen sources, however they have some disadvantages.

Urea can volatilize (lose nitrogen to the air) when applied to the soil surface if it is not incorporated by tillage or rainfall within a few days. Volatilization occurs most rapidly with higher soil temperatures, higher soil pH, surface plant residues and moist soils. Urea is best used before expected rainfall with soil temperatures below 70 degrees and soil pH below 6.5. Do not apply urea to wet soils.

Anhydrous ammonia is a compressed gas that has to be knifed below the soil surface. The soil must be moist enough to retain the gas but not wet enough to form cracks in the soil that allows the gas to escape. Knifing the ammonia into the soil can cut surface roots. The knifing operation also produces soft areas in the soil that can cause equipment to become stuck following rains.

Ammonium sulfate is best used on higher pH soils. The soil acidity produced by ammonium sulfate is three times the acidity produced by ammonium nitrate. It would take 535 pounds of pure calcium carbonate to neutralize the acidity produced by the ammonium sulfate used to supply 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre.

2006 Pecan Show

Bob Williams of Newelton won Best of Show with a Kiowa variety at the 2006 Louisiana Pecan Show held recently at Ag Expo in Monroe. Williams' Kiowa entry was also the Grand Champion In-shell Pecan.

The Reserve Champion In-shell Pecan was won by Donald Sonnier of Benton with a Success variety.

M. L. Mason of Rayville won Grand Champion Shelling Pecan with a Sioux variety. The Reserve Champion Shelling pecan was won by Mark Swanson of Natchitoches Pecans, Inc. of Cloutierville, with an Elliott variety.

Borders Orchards of West Monroe won Grand Champion Native/Seedling Pecan with a large seedling designated Sierra-Audry. The Louisiana Baptist Children's Home of Monroe won Reserve Champion with a small native designated C-1.

Novelty class winner for the smallest pecan was Nathan Albritton of Coushatta. His native entry designated A-1 weighed 825 nuts per pound. The entry is the new record holder for the smallest pecan in the show's 20 year history. Many show attendees marveled at pecans the size of beans. Bob Williams won the largest pecan entry with a Podsednik variety weighing 28 nuts per pound.

Variety blue ribbons were awarded in three divisions.

In-shell division winners and pecan varieties: Borders Orchard – Barton; Natchitoches Pecans, Inc. – Branch, Choctaw and Schley; M. L. Mason – Cape Fear, Desirable and Forkert; Paul Laird of West Monroe – Gloria Grande and Jackson; Bob Williams – Kiowa, Stuart, Wichita and Podsednik; Louisiana Baptist Children's Home – Mahan; Bill Beasley of Ferriday – Nacono and Oconee; and Donald Sonnier – Success and Sumner.

Shelling Division: Paul Laird – Caddo; Bob Williams – Candy; Natchitoches Pecans Inc. – Elliott; Louisiana Baptist Children's Home – Melrose; and M. L. Mason – Sioux.

Native/ Seedling Division: Borders Orchard – Large Seedling (Sierra-Audry); Susan Wilson of Coushatta – Medium Native (W-1); and Louisiana Baptist Children's Home – Small Native (C-1).

The show was held during Ag Expo in Monroe on January 20 -21. The show attracted 79 entries from yard tree and commercial growers from across the state. Entries included 27 named varieties and 20 native/seedlings. Although the number of pecan entries were down this year due to the effects of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the nut quality was excellent.

Crow Management

A crow management survey is included with this newsletter. A number of growers indicated that they had a lot of problems with crows last year. The survey is being used to determine the amount of crow damage that occurred on pecans and how much growers are spending to protect their pecans. Texas and Oklahoma have a crow management program with a crow toxicant. This survey will be used to determine the interest and feasibility for a similar program in Louisiana.

Please return your survey to John Pyzner by mail or e-mail by March 10.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Pyzner". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the left of a vertical red line.

John Pyzner,
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Return to:

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Please Return: March 10, 2006

- 1) Parish or Parishes where orchard(s) are located: _____
- 2) Total number of acres in production (natives and improved): _____
- 3) Are crows a problem in your orchard? Yes _____ No _____
- 4) Estimated loss from crows for 2005 crop:
 - a. Direct crop loss \$ _____
 - b. Management costs (example: cost of propane, shotgun shell, etc.)
\$ _____
- 5) Type of crow management you currently use (check all that apply)
 - a. _____ Propane cannons
 - b. _____ Scare crows
 - c. _____ Kites, eye balloons, noise makers, etc.
 - d. _____ Cracker shells
 - e. _____ Live shooting
 - f. _____ Other: _____
 - g. _____ No management actions taken
- 6) Are you interested in using the Crow toxicant DRC-1339 in your management program in 2006? (See Pecan South, March 2003, pp16 for information on DRC-1339)
Yes _____ No _____
- 7) Other comments