

Database to revolutionise fertiliser decisions

A GROUND-breaking national project has provided the grains and fertiliser industries with the ability to access a national database, which draws upon 5500 field experiments conducted over the past 50 years, to help make better decisions when using fertiliser.

The 'Making Better Fertiliser Decisions for Cropping Systems in Australia' project is the result of three years' work, funded by a \$1.3 million grant from the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), and complemented by similar resourcing from across the grains and fertiliser industries.

Project leader, NSW DPI's Dr Simon Speirs said currently fertiliser inputs comprise up to

30 per cent of total variable costs associated with crop production.

"The aim of the project was to improve confidence in soil testing by providing better calibration data to underpin the fertiliser recommendations obtained by farmers from Fertcare Accredited Advisers," he said.

"Since the early 1960s, many thousands of fertiliser trials, with accompanied soil test values, have been conducted for cereals, pulses and oilseeds across Australia using nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur.

"These trials include a range of crop types, field measurements and soil testing methods, and have been

conducted by state and federal agencies, the fertiliser industry, universities, farming system groups and agricultural advisers.

"Until now, the results of these trials have never been collated into one national database."

Dr Speirs said that all of the trial data would be accessible to registered users who have been trained to use the 'Interrogator' tool that has been developed as part of the project.

"Registered use of the Interrogator is targeted at fertiliser companies, agribusiness, consultants, researchers and agronomists. Just remember, the 'Interrogator' can't be used to make a fertiliser recommendation," he said.

"A series of 'Interrogator train-the-trainer' workshops for researchers and advisers have been held throughout the cropping zone.

"Attendees who successfully complete one of these workshops are then registered to use the 'Interrogator' and will be able to train other advisers to interrogate the database, in time for the beginning of the 2013 winter cropping season.

A website www.bfdc.com.au has been developed to provide direct access to the Interrogator, key publications arising from the project and a series of case studies to showcase soil test-crop response relationships obtained from the database.

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