



Ag. Advantage Monthly

Combining Agricultural Production with Environmental Stewardship

Welcome to ASB Producer Member Neil Bertsch

The Kneehill County ASB would like to welcome it's newest producer member Neil Bertsch. Neil started his position with the ASB in January 2015 and has submitted the following description of his operation.

“Hi, My name is Neil Bertsch. We farm in the Hesketh area 10 miles east of hwy 21 on the 575. My great granddad homesteaded south of Carbon in 1913 and helped my grandad buy a half section south of Hesketh. My dad then sold that half and bought the section, were we live, in 1968. Since then we have grown, are currently farming a little over 4000 acres, and custom farm another 1000 acres of complete cropping. As well, we take on a few thousand acres of custom canola swathing. We are quick to adapt to new technology, and are excited about our farming future in Kneehill County.



I am married to Lonna, and we have 3 children that are grown and doing different things. Our eldest daughter is returning to the farm this summer, after finishing 2 years of ag management classes at Olds College. She will be the 5th generation of Bertsch's to farm in Canada, all those years in the county of Kneehill. Our son and his wife live near Rockyford, and our youngest daughter and her husband live in Edmonton. In 2013 we were honored to receive the Farm Family award for the Kneehill county. Our family was treated to a great day at the Calgary Stampede and treated like royalty for the afternoon. Thanks to my peers for the nomination.

I am looking forward to serving the county on the ag service board. I can see I will be learning lots of new things and I am excited to be a farmers voice to our county.”

Growing Forward 2 Growing Forward 2

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How to Get to the Truth in Miracle Product Claims?

Harry Brook— Crop Specialist, Alberta Agriculture

Even before the federal government changed the rules for registration of fertilizer products, there were plenty of fertilizer products with lofty claims of improved yield. Since the regulations have changed, fertilizers merely have to be proven safe, not even effective, and there are a multitude of new fertilizer products with a wide variety of claims. How do you know which ones are true and which are snake oil?

Now, more than ever before, it is up to the individual to dig for the truth and prove to themselves how effective these products are. There are some clues to look for when trying to separate the wheat from the chaff in agricultural inputs.

Check out the websites for the products. One big clue is the use of testimonials to support the claims made of the product. If there are only user testimonials and no actual research results are presented, it's a big hint that either they haven't actually done any repeatable research on the fertilizer or that the claims they make are not supportable. Another tool often used in marketing is displaying a graph, but magnifying the effect of a particular treatment by only showing the top part of the bar graph, thusly emphasizing the difference. In most research there is a certain percentage of plots that show an effect where most won't. This can be due to the variability of land or just chance. Cherry picking the particular trial that had the greatest effect you want to promote is another common technique. How can you trust these results?

If a research trial has an LSD (least significant difference) it is a measure of how repeatable the results were. Another way to put it is the LSD tries to separate the difference in results between 2 treatments due to the treatment itself versus blind chance or other factors. A trial that meets a low LSD, is more of a sure thing and more repeatable on your farm. A high LSD usually means the results are due to randomness. Evaluate the significance of research results for application to your own farm. The old saying that if you can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bs holds true.

Ultimately, a true test of any fertilizer product or farm input depends on how it works under your management and resources. Testing a new product on your own land requires a bit more time but does give you more useful information. Set up a trial so that you have at least a check strip without the treatment. And above all, measure at harvest for any difference in yield. Regardless of how the treated crop looks, it only pays if the yield increases beyond the cost of application. If it doesn't do that, what benefit do you derive from the product? Part of on-farm research is to check if there is repeatability. Will a particular product give a benefit every year? To prove a product is of benefit to you, you may have to check it over several years.



When it comes to foliar application of nutrients, macrominerals, those being nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulfur, are not absorbed well through the leaf. Any foliar application has to be washed off the leaf and get into the ground to be used. Furthermore, they call them macrominerals because they are needed in large quantities. Too much nitrogen applied foliar will burn the crop leaf, damaging more than helping a nutrient deficit. Micronutrients can be absorbed by the leaf but there are few actual crops with any symptoms of micronutrient deficiencies other than copper. Once again, if you're curious, try it out but leave a check and measure at harvest for any difference. You need to prove it to yourself whether a particular promising fertilizer is actually worth the money. Combine yield monitors are an excellence way to give you some answers. Be skeptical. Don't just believe what the salesman tells you, prove it to yourself.