

Montana Fertilizer Check-Off Programs

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The 1971 Montana legislature passed an Act providing an assessment on commercial fertilizers to provide funding for soil fertility and soil management education and research programs. The intent was to help develop the most accurate information possible concerning fertilizer use and soil management, so that profits could be maximized, while environmental quality would be protected on the many diverse soils and climatic conditions in Montana (Figure 1). Numerous other states have since implemented programs based on this Montana legislation. Soil Scientists from the MSU Extension Service and Agricultural Experiment Station have responsibility for developing and implementing the education and research programs.

Some of the Check-off funds are used by the Montana Department of Agriculture - Plant Industry Division which has responsibility to collect the funds and authority to regulate the manufacture and distribution of commercial fertilizers, including anhydrous ammonia (NH₃). The Department licenses distributors, registers fertilizer products and soil amendments, randomly samples fertilizer products for laboratory analysis and inspects NH₃ facilities for safety requirements.

The Act provides for an advisory committee of seven members. Five members are selected to represent diverse areas of the state and a cross-section of agricultural enterprises. Two members must be from the fertilizer industry. Current members of the advisory committee are Mark Peterson (Havre), Gary Broyles (Rapelje), Robert McKinley (Hingham), Ken Flikkema (Bozeman), Paul Bromenskenk (Billings), Chuck Wilson (Conrad), and John Schipf (Highwood). The Directors of the MSU Extension Service and Agricultural Experiment Station have financial responsibility and jointly appoint these advisors who serve a five-year term. The Department of Agriculture representative serves in an ex-officio capacity to the advisory committee.

The advisory committee meets a minimum of once each year with the MSU Directors and program participants to: (1) review the educational and research programs financed by this Act, (2) recommend needed programs and/or program adjustments and (3) report to the Montana House and/or, Senate Agriculture Committees when requested.

Over the years, hundreds of field research and demonstration plots have been established across Montana in producer fields and at Research Centers to refine fertilization practices and to transfer information. Laboratory and greenhouse studies under more controlled conditions have complimented this field effort. In addition, numerous workshops and schools have been presented to help in the transfer of new and innovative fertilizer management technologies. These statewide programs have led to accelerated adoption of 1 technologies already proven by

research, adaptation of soil and water management practices to local soils and climatic conditions, and refinement of soil testing and fertilization practices in new cropping and tillage systems. Several undergraduate and graduate students have been trained in related areas and are now successful contributors to production agriculture in Montana and elsewhere.,

To augment this program, we are introducing "**Fertilizer Facts.**" These fact sheets will be used to briefly describe accomplishments related to Fertilizer Check-off monies. Future issues will be available through the Extension Soils program, County Extension Offices or Agricultural Experiment Stations.

Figure1. MT Fertilizer Consumption
1968 to 1996

