

by L.J. Murrell

Use Local Databases To Help Sell Fertilizer

Effects of compaction and how starter fertilizers can compensate is but one example of where dealers can help growers via databases.

There are dealers who were just as profitable in 1999 as they were in 1998. There are dealers who struggled to break even.

What's the difference?

The profitable dealers know more about crop production in their areas than anyone else. They have set themselves up as local authorities by establishing local production databases. These dealers are ready for whatever the weather or local conditions can throw at them.

For example, Figures 1 and 2 show data from a ten-year database that would at first appear to have nothing to do with fertilizer and yet have everything to do with it. That in a minute.

First, a look at the figures. The graphs developed from the data dramatically show how compaction reduces yields in both corn and soybeans. Remember, the grower is judging every fertilizer dealer's program as the combine goes through the field.

Let's assume a dealer has sold the farmer a well-designed fertilizer program. If no attention is paid to the soil tilth data illustrated in the figures and the farmer's soil is allowed to remain severely compacted, he could lose 16 bu/A in corn or 4 bu/A in soybeans. This would put the dealer's fertilizer program in jeopardy of not performing up to the satisfaction of either party.

Sub-soiling in central Indiana is costing \$15/A. Depending on the weather, sub-soiling is needed about every three years. Neglect will result in moderate soil compaction that can cost an average 16 bu/A of corn and 3 bu/A of soybeans in a corn-soybean-corn rotation. At \$2 corn and \$4.50 soybeans, the grower stands to lose \$45.50/A—three times the cost of sub-soiling.

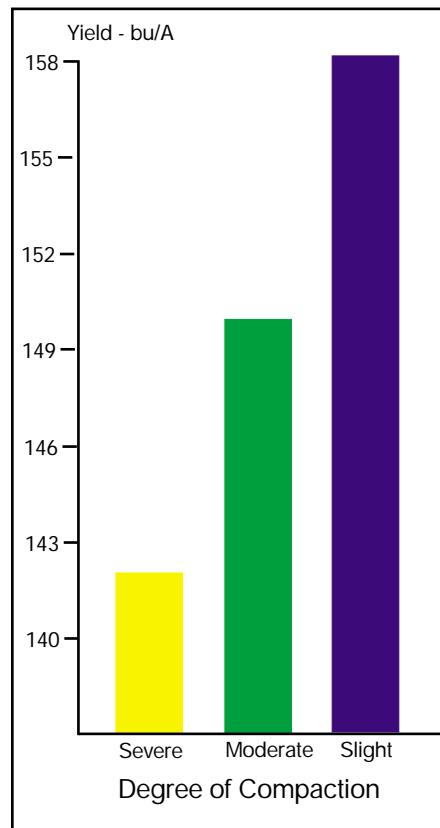


Figure 1. Mean effects of compaction on corn yield, 10-year data base inquiries, Murrell.

Starters to rescue

Let's add a good liquid starter to our hypothetical program and see what happens. Discovering which starter best works is more important than just selling the practice. It is the job of the dealer and agronomist to discover which fertilizers are best suited to local conditions and will enhance crop growth. What works in one area may not work in another.

Let's assume again that a dealer goes to a farmer with the ten-year data base shown in Figure 3.

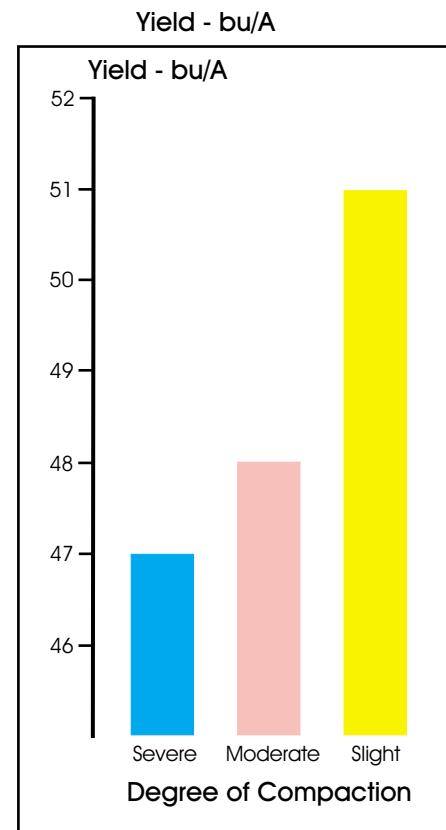


Figure 2. Mean effects of compaction on soybean yield, 10-year data base inquiries, Murrell.

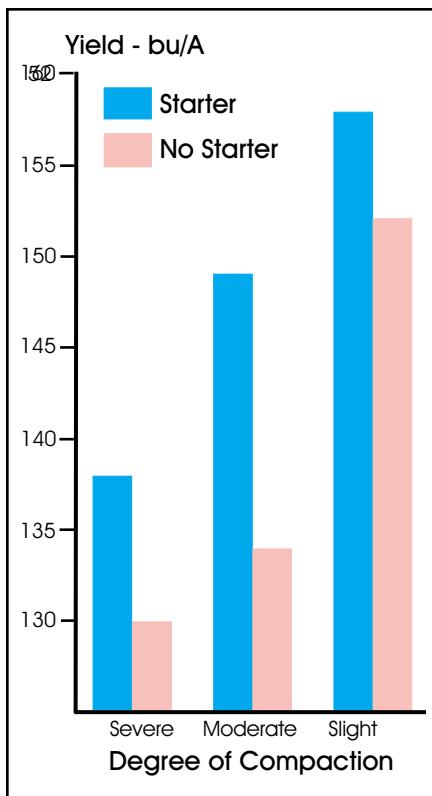


Figure 3. Mean corn yield response to 150 lbs/A of a 12-30-0-3 starter under various compaction stress, 10-year data base inquiries, Murrell.

With only slight soil compaction, there would be approximately a 6-bu/A average corn yield increase by applying starters over 10 years.

Where there was moderate compaction, the effect of the starter would almost double.

Severe soil compaction, on the other hand, would cause more problems than the starter could overcome. Though there would be an 8-bu/A increase in yield that would pay for the starter, the grower would still be in financial trouble with only 138-bu/A corn at \$2/bu to cover \$175 cash rent. The lesson here: the dealer can no longer just sell product. He must look at as much of the

total production picture as is possible if he is to help the grower.

Skill, not luck

There simply is no substitute for local databases. Knowing more about crop production in your area than anyone else means survival for both you and your grower. It is difficult for growers to argue with a database that has their data as a part of it.

Growers still look for crop production guidance. Dealers who weave together information about cultural practices that includes the right product for the right job will continue to be an invaluable asset to their growers.

Murrell is agronomist at Erny's Fertilizer