



Spring Fertility on the Winter Wheat Crop

By: Dave Curry

The 2020 growing season is setting up to be a big wheat year across the Lakeside trading territory. Many of our customers were very keen on getting wheat into the rotation after a few disappointing seasons. Most of the wheat crop locally is starting to look very promising in the field. We have excellent contract pricing in the marketplace for wheat grain sales. Farmers should look at maximizing production this season to gain as many bushels as possible and to get the biggest returns on their bottom line.

Spring fertility on winter wheat is one of the most important steps in growing a high yielding crop. Adequate Nitrogen and Sulphur applied at the right time and correct rate will guarantee that you are setting the stage for maximum yields.

The way the winter has played out, there is a strong likelihood that the wheat crop will break dormancy ahead of a “normal” schedule. This may mean that farmers might be out applying a small amount of fertility earlier than usual to get the wheat’s photosynthetic engine primed. This early shot of fertility will be most noticed on the later planted wheat with limited fall tillers. This early nitrogen and Sulphur at “green up” will help promote early season growth and stimulate tillering. Having a spring game plan in place is key to producing a top yielding crop this season.

Feeding for big yields:

Top end wheat growers are seeing a consistent response to adding fertility during the growing season. For the most part, spring fertility is driven by two main nutrients, nitrogen and sulphur; however, there may be a potential yield response to spring applied phosphorous, potassium, or magnesium if the soil test dictates. As well, the chloride in muriate of potash (KCl) has been shown to give a slight boost in early season disease protection, leading to a small yield response (2-5 bu).

Most of all, don’t skimp on Nitrogen and Sulphur. The following are realistic targets if maximum economic yields are the goal:

135-150 lbs of N and 15-20 lbs of S for soft red fields.

150-180 lbs of N and 20-25 lbs of S for hard red fields.

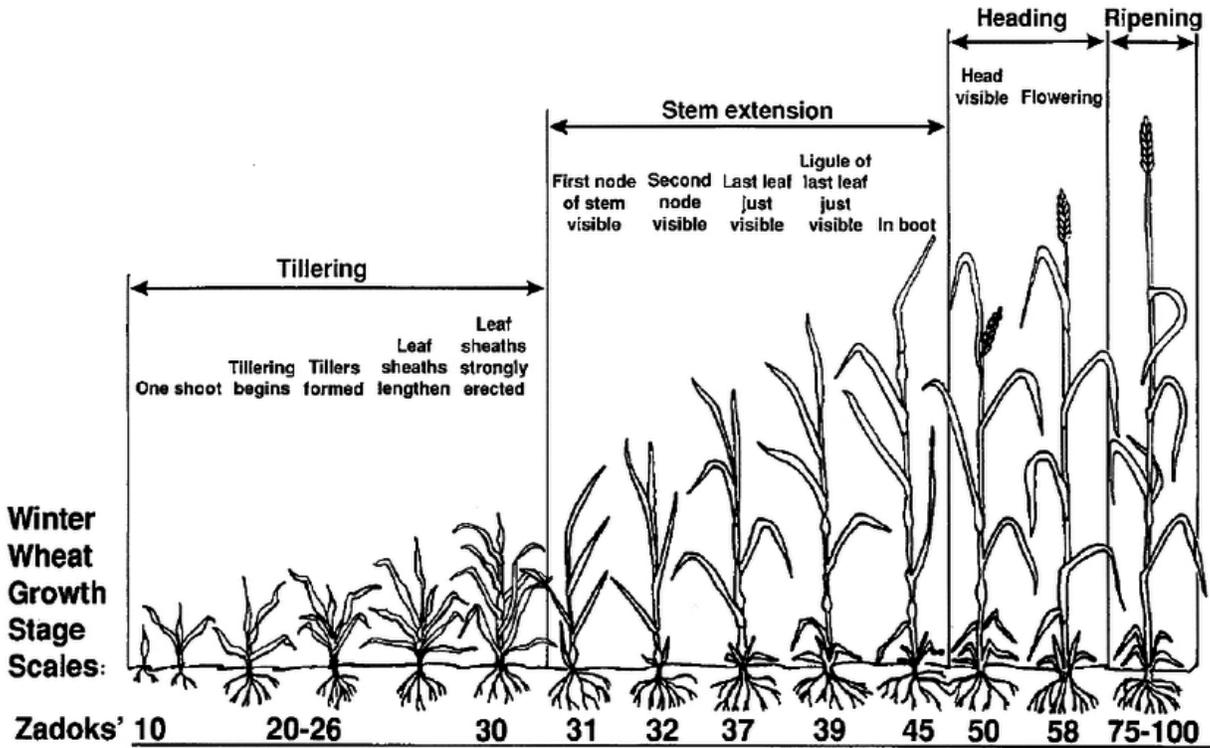
Many farmers are now utilizing a liquid system for their spring fertility applications on winter wheat due to the increased precision and accuracy. A blend of UAN (28-0-0) & ATS (12-0-0 26S) will satisfy the fertility needs. On the dry fertilizer end, a blend of Urea (46-0-0) & AMS (21-0-0 24S) is typically the most economical and fairly common form of wheat fertility.

Note: Limit streaming or miss application. Liquid products applied with the proper streamer nozzles or dry products applied with an Airflow are far superior to fertilizer applied by a spinner spreader.

Split Application:

A split application should ideally reduce the risk of lodging because some fertility will be applied after the initiation of stem elongation and fuel more grain yield over straw height. Split application of fertility is a must in your wheat program if the goal is high yields.

Applying fertility into 2 or even 3 passes will get the most of your invested fertilizer dollar. Application #1 should be at "green up" to promote early season growth and tillering. Application #2 should be targeting around growth stage 32 or 2nd node. This must be on before flag leaf emergence to reduce injury and leaf burn risk. Commonly, the fertility load is split 50% in the first shot and 50% in the second.



Strong agronomic management techniques will shine this season in maximizing the potential of the wheat crop. Spend some time and plan your wheat fertility program with a member of the Lakeside staff before the spring arrives.