FERTILIZERguide

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Winter Wheat and Spring Grains in Continuous Cropping Systems

(Low precipitation zone)

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Recommendations in this guide apply to continuously cropped cereals in low-precipitation zones. This guide is one of a set of publications that address the nutritional requirements of nonirrigated cereal crops in north-central and eastern Oregon (Table 1).

Recommendations for nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulfur, chloride, and zinc are covered in this guide. Soils in the region supply sufficient amounts of other nutrients for optimum production of high-quality grain.

Nitrogen

Calculate nitrogen (N) application rates by subtracting soil test nitrogen from crop demand for nitrogen. Adjust for excessive straw if necessary. Evaluate application rates by reviewing the protein content of harvested grain. A detailed explanation is provided on pages 2–4.

Growing conditions

Annual precipitation: Less than 12 inches

Soil: Silt loam

Soil organic matter content: 1 to 2 percent

Expected yield

15 to 40 bu/acre

Table 1.—Fertilizer guides for nonirrigated cereal production in low, intermediate, and high precipitation zones of Oregon.*

Publication #	Title	Precipitation zone
FG 80	Winter Wheat in Summer-Fallow Systems	Low
FG 81	Winter Wheat and Spring Grains in Continuous Cropping Systems	Low
FG 82	Winter Wheat in Summer-Fallow Systems	Intermediate
FG 83	Winter Wheat in Continuous Cropping Systems	Intermediate
FG 84	Winter Wheat in Continuous Cropping Systems	High

*This set of publications replaces FG 54, *Winter Wheat, Non-irrigated, Columbia Plateau.* Precipitation zones are based on average annual precipitation and are defined as follows: Low = less than 12 inches; Intermediate = 12 to 18 inches; High = more than 18 inches.

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Crop demand for nitrogen

Spring wheat and winter wheat

Multiply expected yield by the nitrogen requirement to get crop demand for nitrogen. The nitrogen requirement, *which is the amount of nitrogen required to produce 1 bushel of wheat*, is based on a grain protein goal (Table 2).

Table 2.—Grain protein goal and corresponding nitrogen requirements (per bushel) for wheat.

Grain protein goal (%)	Nitrogen requirement Average (lb N/bu)	Range (lb N/bu)
9	2.2	2.0–2.4
10	2.4	2.2–2.6
11	2.7	2.4–2.9
12	3.0	2.6–3.2
13	3.3	2.8–3.5
14	3.5	3.0–3.7

Nitrogen requirement

Average nitrogen requirements are suitable for most situations. The ranges given in Table 2 can be used to compensate for growing conditions or varieties that are genetically predisposed to having lower or higher grain protein content.

A grain protein content of 10 percent is optimum for soft white wheat. Desired grain protein concentrations for hard wheat range from 11 to 14 percent. Nitrogen requirements for high-protein hard wheat are greater than those for low-protein soft wheat. The extra protein in hard wheat accumulates in grain when plant uptake of nitrogen exceeds that required for maximum yield (Figure 1).

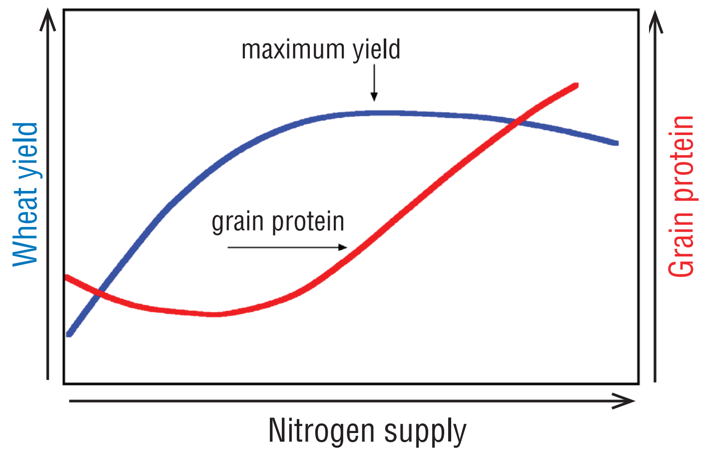

Figure 1.—Generalized relationship of wheat grain yield and grain protein to nitrogen supply.

Barley and oats for feed

The nitrogen requirement of feed-grade barley is approximately 80 percent of the nitrogen requirement for wheat. The nitrogen requirement of oats is about 55 percent of that for wheat. The average nitrogen requirement for barley is 2 lb N/bu. The average nitrogen requirement for oats is 1.4 lb N/bu. There is no standard protein content for feed grain, but 10 percent is a reasonable goal unless higher protein is desired.

Subtract soil test nitrogen

Laboratory methods are used to test soil samples for plant-available nitrogen (soil test nitrogen). Collect samples from the effective root zone in 1-foot increments and have them analyzed for nitrate nitrogen (NO_3-N). Samples from the surface foot also should be analyzed for ammonium nitrogen (NH_4-N). Add reported values for all depths to get total soil test nitrogen.

Annual cropping in low-precipitation zones is most common on shallow soils—those that have an effective rooting depth of 3 feet or less.

Example 1. A nitrogen application rate calculation for soft white spring or winter wheat (10% protein).

Assumptions include:

- Expected yield of 30 bu/acre
- Soil test nitrogen = 35 lb N/acre
- Effective rooting depth of 2 feet

	(lb N/acre)
Crop demand for nitrogen*	
(Expected yield) x (per-bushel N requirement) at desired protein	
(30 bu/acre) x (2.4 lb N/bu) @ 10% protein	**70**
Subtract soil test nitrogen	
0–12"	20
13–24"	15
Total soil test nitrogen	**35**
Nitrogen application rate	**35**

*Crop demand for nitrogen rounded to nearest 5 lb.

Example 2. A nitrogen application rate calculation for hard red spring wheat (14% protein).

Assumptions include:

- Expected yield of 25 bu/acre
- Soil test nitrogen = 40 lb N/acre
- Effective rooting depth of 3 feet

	(lb N/acre)
Crop demand for nitrogen*	
(Expected yield) x (per-bushel N requirement) at desired protein	
(25 bu/acre) x (3.5 lb N/bu) @ 14% protein	**90**
Subtract soil test nitrogen	
0–12"	20
13–24"	15
25–36"	5
Total soil test nitrogen	**40**
Nitrogen application rate	**50**

*Crop demand for nitrogen rounded to nearest 5 lb.

Example 3. A nitrogen application rate calculation for spring barley (10% protein).

Assumptions include:

- Expected yield of 1 ton/acre (42 bu/acre)
- Bushel weight = 48 lb
- Soil test nitrogen = 35 lb N/acre
- Effective rooting depth of 2 feet

	(lb N/acre)
Crop demand for nitrogen*	
(Expected yield) x (per-bushel N requirement) at desired protein	
(42 bu/acre) x (2 lb N/bu) @ 10% protein	**85**
Subtract soil test nitrogen	
0–12"	20
13–24"	15
Total soil test nitrogen	**35**
Nitrogen application rate	**50**

*Crop demand for nitrogen rounded to nearest 5 lb.

Example 4. A nitrogen application rate calculation for spring oats (10% protein).

Assumptions include:

- Expected yield of 0.75 ton/acre (47 bu/acre)
- Bushel weight = 32 lb
- Soil test nitrogen = 40 lb N/acre
- Effective rooting depth of 3 feet

	(lb N/acre)
Crop demand for nitrogen*	
(Expected yield) x (per-bushel N requirement) at desired protein	
(47 bu/acre) x (1.4 lb N/bu) @ 10% protein	**65**
Subtract soil test nitrogen	
0–12"	20
13–24"	15
25–36"	5
Total soil test nitrogen	**40**
Nitrogen application rate	**25**

*Crop demand for nitrogen rounded to nearest 5 lb.

Adjust for excessive straw

Nitrogen "tie-up" in crop residue (immobilization) temporarily reduces the amount of available nitrogen in the soil; immobilization can be a problem when greater-than-average quantities of straw are present in the field.

Grain yield can be used to estimate the quantity of straw. Adjust the calculated nitrogen application rate (Table 3 or Table 4) if grain yield from the previous crop exceeded the **long-term field average.**

Table 3.—Nitrogen application rate adjustments to compensate for **wheat** yield *(straw production)* that is greater than the long-term field average.

Greater-than-average wheat yield (previous crop) (bu/acre)	Corresponding increase in straw production (lb/acre)	Increase application rate by (lb N/acre)
+10	1,000	15
+20	2,000	25
+30	3,000	35

Table 4.—Nitrogen application rate adjustments to compensate for **barley or oat** yield *(straw production)* that is greater than the long-term field average.

Greater-than-average grain yield (previous crop) (ton/acre)	Corresponding increase in straw production (lb/acre)	Increase application rate by (lb N/acre)
+0.5	1,500	20
+1.0	3,000	35
+1.5	4,500	50

Review protein content of harvested grain

A postharvest review of grain protein can be a good way to evaluate application rates. Higher-than-desired protein indicates overfertilization—if growing conditions were normal or about average. High protein also can be caused by unusually dry conditions during the crop year.

Lower-than-desired protein may be due to an insufficient application rate. Low protein also can be a problem when late-season rainfall results in above-average yield or when nitrogen losses occur during or after application. Examples of nitrogen losses include "escape" of anhydrous ammonia from dry soil or an unsealed soil surface, volatilization of surface-applied urea, and nitrate leaching below the root zone.

Phosphorus

Application of 20 to 30 lb P_2O_5/acre should increase yield if soil test phosphorus (P) levels are 5 ppm or less (Table 5). A phosphorus application is not recommended when soil test values are greater than 15 ppm.

Table 5.—Recommended phosphorus fertilizer application rates for a range of soil test values.

Soil test phosphorus (P) (ppm)*	Plant-available index	Amount of phosphate (P_2O_5) to apply (lb/acre)**
0–5	Very low	20–30
6–10* **	**Low**	**10–20**
11–15* **	**Moderate**	**0–10**
Over 15	High	0

*Plant-available index is correlated to sodium bicarbonate-extractable phosphorus only and does not apply to other test methods.

**Recommended application rates apply to banded or subsurface shank applications.

*****Phosphorus response in fields with soil test values between 6 and 15 ppm is highly variable.**

Soil sampling for phosphorus

Collect soil samples for phosphorus testing from the surface foot. Reported values are best thought of as an index of availability. The test cannot be used to calculate the pounds of plant-available P_2O_5 per acre.

Phosphorus response in fields with soil test values of 6 to 15 ppm is highly variable. Yield increases from fertilization seem to be associated with: (1) high yield potentials, (2) late seeding dates, or (3) root diseases that limit plant growth and development. In fields with soil test levels between 6 and 15 ppm, effects of fertilization are best evaluated through on-farm experiments.

Optimum efficiency is achieved by banding phosphorus. Placement of either liquid or dry material with the seed, below the seed, or below and to the side of seed is recommended. Subsurface shank applications also are effective. Broadcast applications are not recommended.

Potassium

Soil potassium (K) concentrations in the region generally are high or very high (>100 ppm extractable K). Fertilizer applications are not recommended.

Sulfur

Sulfur (S) is one of the most limiting nutrients for wheat production—second only to nitrogen in importance. The sulfur requirement of the wheat plant is about one-tenth the nitrogen requirement. Sulfur is necessary for optimum yield and high-quality baking flour.

Sulfur deficiencies in wheat are fairly common in the spring after a wet winter. Above-average precipitation moves sulfate-sulfur (SO_4-S), *the form of sulfur available to plants*, below the root zone. Deficiency symptoms often disappear later in the season as root growth extends to deeper layers of the soil profile.

The soil sulfur (SO_4-S) test is not definitive. Low or moderate soil test values (Table 6) are a first indication that fertilization might be warranted. Other factors need to be considered. Yield responses are more likely if one or more of the following situations apply: (1) winter wheat is seeded late in the fall, (2) more than 5 years have passed since the last application of sulfur, and/or (3) greater-than-average quantities of straw are present in the field. Field experience, observation, and on-farm experimentation provide valuable information about the need for sulfur.

Table 6.—Plant-available sulfate-sulfur and recommended fertilizer application rates for a range of soil test values.

Soil test sulfate-sulfur (SO_4-S) (ppm)	Plant-available index	Amount of sulfur (S) to apply (lb/acre)*
0–5	Low	10–15
6–10	Moderate	10
Over 10	High	0

*A decision to apply sulfur should not be based on soil test results alone. Sulfur may be beneficial if SO_4-S soil test values are low or moderate and if: (1) winter wheat is seeded late in the fall, (2) more than 5 years have passed since the last application of sulfur, and/or (3) greater-than-average quantities of straw are present in the field.

Optimum efficiency is achieved by banding sulfur. Placement of either liquid or dry material with the seed, below the seed, or below and to the side of seed is recommended. Subsurface shank applications also are effective.

Ammonium thiosulfate liquid (Thiosul, 12-0-0-26) is an effective source of sulfur, but it can injure or kill seedlings when placed with the seed. Avoid this problem by placing the product below or below and to the side of seed.

Elemental sulfur should be used with caution because it is not immediately plant-available. Microorganisms oxidize elemental sulfur to plant-available sulfate, but conversion occurs slowly and is regulated by the moisture status and temperature of the soil. Most of the elemental sulfur will not be available until 2 or 3 years after application. Rates of 100 lb elemental S/acre may be necessary to ensure that adequate sulfate is available during the first growing season.

Soil sampling for sulfur

Collect soil samples for sulfur (SO_4-S) testing from the surface foot. The test is not definitive, and reported values are best thought of as an index of availability. Field experience, observation, and on-farm experimentation provide valuable information about the need for sulfur.

Chloride

Research shows that application of chloride (Cl) may increase grain yield, test weight, and/or kernel size. It is important to note, however, that these responses occur only some of the time.

Chloride applications are known to increase yield of winter wheat suffering from “Take-all” root rot, and they reduce the severity of physiological leaf spot. Yield responses in the absence of disease also have been observed and may be a consequence of improved plant–water relations.

Consider applying chloride if soil test concentrations in the surface foot are less than 10 ppm. The recommended application rate for chloride is 10 to 30 lb/acre. Benefits from fertilization may last for several years.

Yield increases, when they occur, usually range from 2 to 5 bu/acre. Responses are most often associated with above-average yield. Growers are advised to experiment with chloride on small acreages.

Do not apply chloride with the seed; it is a soluble salt that can delay germination or injure or kill germinating seeds. Rain is required after application to move surface-broadcast chloride into the root zone.

Potassium chloride (KCl) is the most readily available source of chloride.

Zinc

Zinc (Zn) fertilization of dryland barley and wheat has not been economical in research trials. On-farm experiments with fertilization should be limited to small acreages. A zinc application rate of 5 lb/acre is appropriate. A 10 lb/acre application should last for several years.

The potential for a grain yield response increases when DTPA-extractable soil test zinc values (surface foot) are less than 0.3 ppm, soil phosphorus levels are moderate to high, the soil pH is greater than 7.5, and yield potential exceeds 50 bu/acre.

For more information

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*Oregon State University and Pacific Northwest Extension publications

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