



The Fertilizer Institute

Nourish, Replenish, Grow

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1980-2010: U.S. CORN PRODUCTION NEARLY DOUBLES USING SLIGHTLY FEWER NUTRIENTS

U.S. Department of Agriculture Data Reveal Sustainable Farming is occurring through Voluntary Nutrient Stewardship Efforts

Washington, D.C. – The Fertilizer Institute (TFI) announced today that between 1980 and 2010, U.S. farmers nearly doubled corn production using slightly fewer fertilizer nutrients than were used in 1980. The announcement is based on fertilizer application rate data released last week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Specifically, in 1980, farmers grew 6.64 billion bushels of corn using 3.9 pounds of nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) for each bushel and in 2010 they grew 12.45 billion bushels using 1.6 pounds of nutrients per bushel produced. In total, this represents an 87.5 percent increase in production with 4 percent fewer nutrients during that same timeframe. Corn production accounts for half of U.S. fertilizer use and experts estimate that 40 to 60 percent of world food production is attributable to fertilizers.

“Through improvements in modern technology and old fashioned ingenuity, our farmers are using fertilizer with the greatest efficiency in history and have again shown why U.S. agriculture will continue to feed the world,” said TFI President Ford West. “Fertilizer nutrients are essential components in food, feed, fiber and fuel production and we anticipate that maximizing production from future new seed varieties will require a diet that can only be met through the use of commercially produced fertilizers.”

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This achievement shown in the USDA data is notable for its environmental, economic and social benefits. Each additional bushel of corn produced through these efficiencies can in turn produce either 6 pounds of beef, 13 pounds of pork, 20 pounds of chicken, or 28 pounds of fish for dinner plates in the United States and around the world.

Increasingly, U.S. farmers' fertilizer use has been under intense scrutiny for its potential impact on treasured water bodies such as the Chesapeake Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The USDA data demonstrates that farmers are caring for the nation's water resources in large part through voluntary efforts.

“Efficient food production and protection of the environment are not mutually exclusive goals,” said West. “Farmers across the country including in the watersheds that drain to the Chesapeake Bay and the Mississippi River can be proud that their adoption of site specific nutrient management and their use of higher yielding varieties of corn are making a substantial and even massive contributions to the effort to reduce nutrient losses to waters across the nation.”

“While our critics' voices are often louder than our advocates – the numbers don't lie - this new data shows yet one more reason that agriculture is a leader in environmental stewardship. We think this is a triumph of the role science and economics in sustainable farming and expect that through the more widespread adoption of 4R nutrient stewardship, (use of the right fertilizer source at the right rate, right time and right place) farmers and the fertilizer industry will continue to help feed a growing world population.”

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The Fertilizer Institute represents the nation's fertilizer industry. Producers, wholesalers, retailers and trading firms which comprise its membership are served by a full time Washington, D.C., staff in various legislative, educational and technical areas as well as with information and public relations programs. Further information and resources on 4R nutrient stewardship is available at www.nutrientstewardship.com