Soil Health Tool Launches at Woods End, Brookside and Ward Labs

Growers looking for a way to measure soil health can now get an actual soil test for it

MOUNT VERNON, MAINE, US, January 24, 2014 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new soil health movement is on its way that farmers and soil labs are keen to participate in. "We are very excited to offer the Soil Health Tool to our clients since soil testing methods are currently missing the biological component," says Dr. Luke Baker from Brookside Laboratories, OH. Rollout meetings with growers and consultants during 2013 and early 2014 in many states have shown a very positive response. Years of research have led to the launch of a new soil test by at least 3 labs across the USA, including Woods End Labs (ME), Ward Labs (NE) and Brookside Labs (OH).

The idea of the "Toolbox" has been under development by Will Brinton (Woods End), Dr. Rick Haney (USDA-ARS-TX) and others since 2005. "It started as a project to standardize a cost effective soil biology test adaptable to modern labs. The earlier invention of Brinton's Solvita® test which measures CO2-respiration formed the basis. USDA-ARS then expanded the toolbox to include a new way of measuring N-P-K in order to address farmer fertilizer issues. The resulting package is the Soil Health Tool now considered the "next step" for labs performing soil testing.

Ward Labs' Lance Gunderson explains: "Now there are 3 labs in 3 differing regions collecting new soil health data, and this will help us re-calibrate and better understand regional potentials". Brookside's Dr. Luke Baker: "With the Tool, we can include soil biology when estimating plant available nutrients. After analyzing hundreds of samples, we feel that this could be the missing link in soil plant nutrient analysis." The Soil Health Tool is an open-source system. The main goal, Brinton says, is to "save farmers money on unneeded fertilization while taking stock on your soil's health". Samples can be sent to Woods End by clicking on the soil test link, or use the Soil Solvita map to find a lab near you. On the lab reports, growers will see new terms such as "CO2 rate", "microbial active carbon" and "water soluble carbon". These are used as indicators of biological factors linked to soil's intrinsic nutrient supply powers. According to Haney (USDA-ARS), "the methods use green chemistry, in that the soil analysis uses a soil microbial activity indicator, a soil water extract (nature's solvent) and H3A, a soil extractant that mimics organic acids produced by living plant roots to temporarily change the soil pH, thereby increasing nutrient availability." The end result of the new test is a rank called the Soil Health Score, "representing the overall health of the soil system. It combines 5 independent measurements of your soil's biological properties."

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