

Soil testing program - FAQs

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Eligibility

1. What are the eligibility requirements?

The program is open to **beef, dairy and sheep grazing enterprises** with at least **40 hectares of cleared, arable land** that is located in one of the following catchments:

- Peel-Harvey
- Leschenault
- Vasse-Wonnerup/Geographe
- Hardy Inlet
- Wilson Inlet
- Torbay Inlet
- Oyster Harbour (located where the average annual rainfall exceeds 600mm)

Places in the soil testing program are limited. Meeting the eligibility requirements does not guarantee you a place in the program. Places will be prioritised based on a number of factors including farm size, sub-catchment and distance to waterways.

2. My farm is under 40 hectares of cleared, arable land – can I still apply?

Yes. Farms with less than 40 arable hectares will be considered but are less likely to be accepted.

We encourage farmers with properties with less than 40 arable hectares to contact their neighbours and apply together under one, single application. Neighbours can apply together if their properties are only separated by a fence, road or creek.



3. What is considered cleared, arable land?

Cleared, arable land includes:

- Cleared paddocks used for livestock pasture.

Cleared, arable land **does not** include:

- Any land not used for livestock pasture such as holding yards.
- Land vegetated with species other than pasture where livestock graze.
- Orchards or vineyards where livestock graze.
- Paddocks of Blue Gum where livestock graze.
- Cropping paddocks.

These are excluded because of seasonal overlap of harvesting operations with soil sampling, hazards that stubble represents to sampling equipment, the potential fire risk, and the requirement for different interpretation of soil test data on cropping paddocks compared with pasture paddocks.

4. I run horses and other livestock on my property. Am I eligible?

You **must predominantly run beef, dairy or sheep**. If more than 50 per cent of the cleared area on your farm is used to graze beef, sheep or dairy, you are eligible. If more than 50 per cent of the cleared area on your farm is used to graze horses, you are not eligible.

Cost

5. How much will it cost me?

- For those who **have not** participated in a similar program previously the cost to participate is \$300.
- For those who **have** participated in a similar program previously the cost to participate is \$25 per paddock with a minimum spend of \$300.

6. Surely it's cheaper for me to continue with my traditional fertiliser program. Isn't soil testing expensive?

The cost of soil testing can be offset in many cases by reduced fertiliser expenditure. It is not uncommon for participants in the program to report significantly reduced fertiliser costs of \$10,000 or more. Using more appropriate application rates, types of fertiliser and soil amendments can increase production and reduce farm costs. Modelling undertaken by DPIRD indicates that using an evidence-based approach to fertiliser management based on soil testing is a far more cost-effective strategy than a traditional fertiliser program.

7. What would it cost to have this done commercially?

	Estimated value	Cost to new participants	Cost to previous participants
Soil sampling	\$750	\$300	\$25 per paddock (minimum \$300)
Soil test analysis	\$50 per paddock		
Tissue testing & advice	\$800		
Digitising farm map	\$400		
Nutrient mapping report	\$350		
Workshop explaining results	\$600		
Agronomic advice	\$750		
Total for a 15 paddock farm	over \$4400 in value	\$300	\$375



Timing

8. What is the timing of activities for my involvement?

19 Jun 2022	Expressions of interest close and farm maps must be submitted.
Jul - Aug 2022	You will be contacted regarding the outcome of your expression of interest.
Aug - Oct 2022	If you have been accepted, your local catchment officer will contact you to provide further details about the program and arrange to conduct a survey.
Oct - Nov 2022	Soil sampling training sessions for participants in the do-it-yourself program.
Nov 2022 - Jan 2023	Soil sampling will be carried out.
Feb - Mar 2022	Local or online workshops where you will receive your results and will be shown how to use your nutrient maps.
Mar - May 2023	One-on-one agronomic advice.
Aug - Oct 2023	Sampling for plant tissue testing.
Nov - Dec 2023	Optional local workshops held for ongoing support and advice.

9. When will my paddocks be sampled?

Sampling by experienced samplers and do-it-yourself soil sampling occurs during summer – from late November to late January. It depends on seasonal conditions and availability of samplers and equipment. You will be contacted in advance to arrange a suitable time.

10. When will I get to see the soil test results?

Results will be presented to you at a workshop in February or March 2023. The workshop will help you interpret your results and farm nutrient maps. You will also have the opportunity to select an agronomist, who will provide fertiliser recommendations specific to your operation.

11. When do I have to pay?

Invoices will be sent out after your property is sampled. Payment is required by **February 2023** and must be received before you attend the workshop.

12. When will workshops be held?

In February or March 2023. The workshops maybe in person or online. You will also be invited to an optional workshop in spring 2023.

13. What if I need to order my fertiliser before I get my results?

It is best to wait until you have received your soil test results, attended the workshop and consulted an agronomist before purchasing and applying fertiliser.

However, if you normally order fertiliser to get the early season, or if you have entered into a fixed price contract, you may be required to order your fertiliser before receiving the soil test results. If so, when you order your fertiliser, it is important to inform your supplier that you are participating in this program and to discuss the possibility of changing your order due to the soil test results.



14. What happens if I need to fertilise my paddocks in the lead up to soil sampling?

If you have applied urea, then there will be no issue. Fertilisers that contain phosphorus (super), potassium (potash) and sulphur (super), or amendments such as lime can affect soil test results and sampling may have to be delayed. It is best not to fertilise for three months before soil sampling. If fertiliser or lime has been applied, sampling may be rescheduled on your property, but only until the end of the sampling period (late-January). If this cannot be accommodated, it will be necessary to collect twice as many cores in fertilised paddocks. This can increase cost and time required for sampling. In some cases, recently fertilised paddocks on your farm may not be sampled. Choosing the do-it-yourself sampling option will give you more flexibility to schedule soil sampling and fertiliser application.

15. I will be away during the period when soil sampling is likely to occur. Who do I contact to arrange my sampling and access to my property?

Contact your catchment officer. Your catchment officer will discuss sampling arrangements with the sampling team and arrange a suitable time for your property to be sampled.

Quality Assurance

16. What is Fertcare?

[Fertcare®](#) is an independent quality standard for agronomists and fertiliser advisors. The Fertcare Accredited Advisor program assesses an individual's competence to make soil and fertiliser recommendations which optimise productivity while protecting the environment.

Fertcare Accredited Advisors are assessed against standards set by Fertilizer Australia. Once competent they are audited biennially to ensure that these standards are being routinely applied.

17. How can I be sure that my farm will be sampled well?

Both do-it-yourself (DIY) and contractor soil sampling is undertaken according Fertcare sampling guidelines.

If you apply for option A - DIY soil sampling: you will receive training and have access to an experienced sampler who will ensure you understand how to reliably sample. Your knowledge of your own paddock variability is an advantage in collecting a representative sample.

If you apply for option B - contractor sampled: the experienced sampler will ask your advice on where to sample in each paddock to avoid hazards and to obtain a representative sample.

18. Who will analyse my soil samples?

Consistent with Fertcare accreditation, soil samples will be analysed at an ASPAC (Australasian Soil and Plant Analysis Council) certified laboratory.



19. How can I be sure that the soil test data from my farm will be interpreted appropriately?

The critical values against which your soil test data is assessed have been deemed by Fertilizer Australia as accredited and in line with the best currently available science.

Analysis

20. What will be analysed in my soil samples?

pH (acidity), phosphorus, potassium, sulphur, phosphorus buffering index, organic carbon, ammonium, nitrate, electrical conductivity and soil texture.

21. Why isn't comprehensive analysis offered in the program?

Analysis of trace elements are of limited value in soil samples because of the very low concentrations and the poor relationship between the soil test and plant growth. Tissue sampling is a better option to assess trace element levels in pasture

22. Why aren't you measuring subsoil acidity?

Subsoil acidity is not measured. This is an issue mainly in the wheatbelt where the rooting depth is greater and drainage better. In high rainfall coastal areas, rooting depth is limited and less affected by acidity at shallower rooting depths. The recommended target pH includes a level which when achieved will result in the slow pH change of soil below the 10 cm sampling depth.

Sampling

23. What are the two sampling options?

Option A: Do-it-yourself (DIY) sampling

An experienced soil sampler will visit your property between mid-November 2022 and mid-January 2023 (exact timing will depend on your location and sampler availability). You will be provided with sampling equipment and assistance to sample 3 paddocks on your farm. Prior to this you will have undergone in-field training and shown how to take soil samples according to Fertcare guidelines. Taking your own soil samples allows you to have control over the sampling process.

Option B: contractor sampled

An experienced soil sampler will visit your property between November 2022 and January 2023 to take soil samples. Please note – for this option, priority will be given to landholders new to this program.



24. How do I access the soil sampling equipment if I am in option A - DIY soil sampling?

You will be contacted to arrange a suitable time for the delivery of the sampling equipment (e.g. soil sample bags and auger).

25. What will I need to sample my own farm under option A - DIY soil sampling?

- Battery operated drill with spare charged batteries.
- An iPhone or iPad to record sampling locations (the device needs a SIM slot, but no internet connection or SIM is needed) - you will be loaned one if you don't have one.
- You will need to download particular apps in advance – advice will be provided prior to you sampling.
- Time available to dedicate to soil sampling your entire farm. In most cases this will take less than a day.

26. What will the training involve for the DIY soil sampling?

Training will include:

- Online training videos.
- Field training sessions at a local farm in October or November 2022.
- Assistance from an experienced sampler on your property, where you will be given help to sample at least one paddock.

The training will explain:

- How to calibrate and use a battery drill powered sampling auger.
- How to pick where you sample and why this is important.
- How to ensure you collect a representative sample.
- How to record sampling locations using a mobile device.
- How to manage sample bags and labelling (these will be provided).
- Tips on how to minimise the amount of time it will take you to sample your farm.

27. Will I get to keep the sampling equipment if I choose option A - DIY soil sampling?

No, all sampling equipment will be collected when your soil samples are collected. However, sampling augers may be available to borrow from your local catchment officer in the future.

28. What depth are samples taken from

Soil samples are collected from the top 10 cm of soil. Pasture responses are calibrated to this depth in WA.



Benefits, requirements and obligations

29. What are my obligations in the program?

- To provide details in your application about the location of farm(s) you are nominating for the program within the due dates.
- To provide an accurate and legible map displaying farm boundary, paddock boundaries and paddock names. Maps are an essential part of the program to ensure an accurate sampling regime and report generation.
- Provide access to your property for sampling.
- To carefully read information sent to you in the project.
- You, or a representative will need to be available for meetings to discuss your farming operation.
- To attend a workshop at which you will receive your soil test results and insights into interpreting the results and farm maps.
- In the spirit of the program, follow the evidence-based advice provided from the soil tests and your agronomist.

30. What can I expect from involvement in the program?

- Soil testing all or most of the paddocks on your property.
- Analysis through an ASPAC accredited laboratory.
- A workshop to explain how to interpret the soil test results.
- Access to a Fertcare accredited agronomist for fertiliser advice.
- More than \$4000 value for \$300.
- In most cases a significant saving on your fertiliser bill.
- Improved understanding of soil testing and farm nutrient requirements.
- To be provided with expert guidance on sampling your paddocks.
- Access to online tools - nutrient and lime calculators.
- To meet other local landholders involved in the program.

31. Why do I need to provide a map showing my farm boundary, paddocks and paddock names with my application?

Maps play a part in the assessment of your application – for example where your farm is located in relation to catchment boundaries, rainfall isohyets and other criteria. Paddock boundaries and names are also essential – this is because your soil test results are interpreted and presented as a colour coded farm map showing each paddock. This will enable you to make a fertiliser plan for each paddock and account for differences across your farm.



Get involved

32. What other activities are occurring that might be useful to me?

Optimising fertiliser spreaders through Accu-Spread

Better fertiliser management through soil testing is only the first step to ensuring nutrients stay on the farm and out of our waterways. Fertiliser spreaders often deliver highly variable spread patterns, compromising production rates and farm profitability as some areas within the paddock receive too much fertiliser and others too little.

Understanding the spread pattern of your fertiliser spreader when using different products can result in higher productivity and healthier waterways. Accu-Spread days demonstrate how to test and calibrate your fertiliser spreading equipment ensuring an even distribution of fertiliser on your paddocks.

Contact your local catchment officer for information about upcoming Accu-Spread demonstration days or visit estuaries.dwer.wa.gov.au/strategies/sustainable-agriculture/accu-spread/

Other opportunities

Contact your local catchment council to find out about other projects and opportunities.

Visit estuaries.dwer.wa.gov.au/participate/ to find out how else you can help protect our waterways and estuaries.

Catchment officers' contact details

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