

Fertiliser Management Program - FAQs

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Two Programs for 2023/24 season

1. What is the difference between the two programs – Healthy Estuaries WA and Soil Wise?

Healthy Estuaries WA is open to beef, dairy and sheep grazing enterprises with at least 40 hectares of cleared arable land in high-rainfall catchments: see [eligibility map](#) for Healthy Estuaries WA catchments.

Soil Wise is open to farmers that have previously been ineligible for Healthy Estuaries WA. This opportunity is for one-year only! It is open to farmers in south-west WA, for properties of all sizes with a focus on grazing enterprises.

Both programs are subsidised, and include soil testing, workshops, field days, agronomic advice and plant tissue testing. Also included are training and support to undertake soil sampling and/or plant tissue sampling, and assistance to interpret the results.

Participants of Healthy Estuaries WA will be invoiced by DPIRD at various rates given in Cost section below. Participants of Soil Wise will be invoiced by CSBP lab for analysis costs.



Eligibility

2. What are the eligibility requirements of Healthy Estuaries WA?

The program is open to **beef, dairy and sheep grazing enterprises** with at least **40 hectares of cleared, arable land** that is in one of the following Healthy Estuaries WA 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 several factors including farm size, sub-catchment, distance to waterways and previous participation in the program. Priority will be given to applicants willing to sample their own farm under the do-it-yourself (DIY) option (training, support and equipment is provided).

3. What are the eligibility requirements of Soil Wise?

Soil Wise is open to farmers that do not meet the eligibility requirements for Healthy Estuaries WA. This opportunity is available for one year only. Farms must be in south-west WA, but can be of any size and must predominantly be a grazing enterprise.

Participants must be willing to undertake their own soil sampling and post samples to CSBP lab. Participants must also be prepared to travel to neighbouring catchments to attend on-farm training sessions and/or collect sampling equipment.

4. 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 if the applicant selects the DIY sampling option.

5. 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 mainly because the standards used for interpretation of soil test data are specifically for pasture paddocks.

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

You **must predominantly run beef, dairy or sheep** to participate in Healthy Estuaries WA. If more than 50 per cent of the cleared area on your farm is used to graze beef, sheep or dairy, you are eligible for Healthy Estuaries WA. If more than 50 per cent of the cleared area on your farm is used to graze horses, you may be able to participate in the Soil Wise Program.

Cost

7. How much will it cost me?

- For those who **have not participated** in a similar program previously - the cost to participate in Healthy Estuaries WA is \$300.
- For those who **have participated** in a similar program since 2016 - the cost to participate in Healthy Estuaries WA is:
 - \$25 per paddock with a minimum spend of \$300 for DIY sampling option.
 - \$50 per paddock with a minimum spend of \$500 for contractor sampling option. The maximum contribution towards contractor sampling is \$2,500.
- For those who are **not eligible** to participate in Healthy Estuaries WA - the cost to participate in Soil Wise is \$50 per paddock. There is no minimum spend.
- As a participant in the DIY program, you will have an option to purchase the sampling kit at a discounted price. The equipment cost will be discounted by \$50 for every paddock you sample yourself at the time of purchase.

8. 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. When following recommendations based on soil testing, previous participants in the program have reported an average reduction of \$12,000 per year on the cost of phosphorus fertiliser.

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.

9. 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 for DIY sampling (minimum \$300)	\$50 per paddock for contractor sampled (minimum \$500)
Soil test analysis	\$50 per paddock			
Tissue testing & advice	\$1000			
Digitising farm map	\$400			
Nutrient mapping report	\$350			
Fertiliser workshop	\$600			
Agronomic advice	\$1000			
Total for a 15 paddock farm	nearly \$5000 in value	\$300	\$375	\$750

Timing

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

25 Jun 2023	Expressions of interest close and farm maps clearly identifying paddocks to be sampled must be submitted.
Jul 2023	You will be contacted regarding the outcome of your expression of interest.
Aug - Oct 2023	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 2023	Soil sampling training sessions for participants in the do-it-yourself program.
Nov 2023 - Jan 2024	Soil sampling will be carried out.
Feb - Mar 2024	Local workshops where you will receive your results and will be shown how to use your nutrient reports.
Mar - May 2024	One-on-one agronomic advice.
Aug - Oct 2024	Sampling for plant tissue testing.
Nov - Dec 2024	Optional local workshops held for ongoing support and advice.

11. When will my paddocks be sampled?

Sampling by experienced samplers and do-it-yourself (DIY) 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.

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

Results will be presented to you at a workshop in late-February or early-March 2024. The workshop will help you interpret your results and farm nutrient reports. You will also have the opportunity to select an agronomist, who will provide fertiliser recommendations specific to your business requirements.

13. When do I have to pay?

For participants in Healthy Estuaries WA - an invoice will be sent by DPIRD after your property is sampled. Payment is required by **February 2024**, and must be received before you attend the workshop or receive your results.

For participants in Soil Wise – an invoice will be sent by CSBP lab once your samples have been analysed. Payment is made directly to CSBP lab.

14. When will workshops be held?

In late-February or early-March 2024 – it is a requirement of the program that you attend this workshop. You may also be invited to an optional workshop in spring 2024 (subject to availability).

15. 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.

16. 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 so 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.

17. 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

18. 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.

19. 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 accurately 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.

20. 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.

21. 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

22. 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.

23. 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. Plant tissue testing is a better option to assess trace element levels in pasture.

24. 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

25. What are the two sampling options?

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

You will receive training, support and the equipment needed to collect your own soil samples. Taking your own soil samples allows you to have control over the sampling process. It also helps you to see any variations in soil type across your property.

An experienced soil sampler will visit your property between mid-November 2023 and mid-January 2024 (exact timing will depend on your location and sampler availability). You will be provided with sampling equipment and assistance to sample at least one, but no more than three paddocks on your farm. Prior to this you will have undergone training and shown how to take representative soil samples according to Fertcare guidelines.

Nearly three-quarters of previous participants chose the 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) approach as each paddock can be easily sampled in 20-30 minutes.

Option B: contractor sampled

An experienced soil sampler will visit your property between November 2023 and January 2024 to take soil samples (exact timing will depend on your location and sampler availability).

Please note the following for this option:

- Priority will be given to landholders new to this program.
- Properties with less than 10 paddocks will not be sampled by a contractor (as this can easily be done in less than one-day under the DIY program). Exceptional circumstances will be considered.
- Paddocks less than 2ha in size will not be sampled by a contractor.
- For returning farmers that have participated since 2016, the cost is \$50 per paddock for this option, compared to \$25 per paddock for the DIY option.

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

You can loan the sampling equipment free of charge. You will be contacted to arrange a suitable time for the delivery of the sampling equipment (e.g. soil sample bags, auger, etc). If your farm is not located within one of the Healthy Estuaries WA catchments, you may be required to travel to collect the sampling equipment.

27. Can I purchase the soil sampling equipment if I am in option A - DIY soil sampling?

As a participant in the DIY program, you will have an option to purchase the sampling kit at a discounted price. The equipment cost will be discounted by \$50 for every paddock you sample yourself at the time of purchase. The maximum discount available is \$600, which is the value of the kit.

The sampling kit will contain an auger, pogo stick, bucket, pen and clip board (drill is not included). Soil sample bags will be provided for this season, they can be easily obtained in the future for further sampling.

Example of cost:

- Sample 5 paddocks and receive a discount of $5 \times \$50 = \250 . Pay \$350 for the kit.
- Sample 8 paddocks and receive a discount of $8 \times \$50 = \400 . Pay \$200 for the kit.
- Sample 12 paddocks and receive a discount of $12 \times \$50 = \600 . Pay **\$0** for the kit.

Note – most people can comfortably sample 20 paddocks in one day. The estimated sampling time is 20-30 minutes per paddock.

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

- Battery operated 18V drill with spare charged batteries.
- A mobile phone or tablet 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 may need to download particular apps before sampling – advice on how to use them will be provided.
- Time available to dedicate to soil sampling your entire farm. In most cases this will take less than a day.

29. 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 2023.
- Assistance from an experienced sampler on your property, where you will be given help to sample at least one but no more than 3 paddocks.

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.

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

This depends on whether you have been loaned the equipment or if you have opted to purchase equipment at a discounted price.

All loaned sampling equipment must be returned when your soil samples are collected. Sampling augers may be available to borrow from your local catchment officer in the future.

31. 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

32. 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 sampling map displaying farm boundary, paddock boundaries, paddock names and which paddocks are to be excluded from sampling. 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 to receive your soil test results as a colour-coded report, understand how to interpret the results and optimise fertiliser use.
- In the spirit of the program, follow the evidence-based advice provided from the soil tests and your agronomist.

33. 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.
- Nearly \$5000 value for a small financial contribution.
- In most cases a significant saving on your fertiliser bill – average of \$12,000 reduction in phosphorus fertiliser cost reported by previous participants.
- 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.
- An opportunity to join over 1600 farmers working to improve water quality in our local waterways and estuaries.

34. 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 report showing each paddock. This will enable you to make a fertiliser plan for each paddock and account for differences across your farm.

Get involved!

35. 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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