

Fertiliser Management Program - FAQs

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Eligibility

1. 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 (high rainfall zone)

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).

2. My farm is under 40 hectares – can I still apply?

Yes. Farms with less than 40 hectares will be considered if the applicant selects the DIY sampling option, though priority will be given to larger properties if program demand is high.



3. What is considered cleared arable land?

Cleared, arable land includes:

- Cleared paddocks used for livestock pasture or hay production.

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

4. 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 arable area on your farm is used to graze beef, sheep or dairy, you are eligible for Healthy Estuaries WA.

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 since 2016 - the cost to participate is:
 - \$25 per paddock with a minimum spend of \$300 for do-it-yourself (DIY) sampling option.
 - \$50 per paddock with a minimum spend of \$500 for contractor sampling option. The maximum contribution towards contractor sampling is \$3,000 (as a maximum of 60 paddocks will be sampled).

As a participant in the DIY program, you will have an option to purchase the sampling kit at a discounted price (available as a one-time discount). The equipment cost will be discounted by \$50 for every paddock you sample yourself at the time of purchase.

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. 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.

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 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

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

28 Jul 2024	Expressions of interest close.
Jul-Aug 2024	You will be contacted regarding the outcome of your expression of interest. Those who have been shortlisted must submit a farm map clearly identifying paddocks to be sampled.
Aug - Oct 2024	Successful applicants will be contacted by your local catchment officer to provide further details about the program and arrange to conduct a survey.
Oct - Nov 2024	Training sessions for participants in the DIY soil sampling program.
Nov 2024 - Jan 2025	Soil sampling will be carried out.
Feb - Mar 2025	Local workshops where you will receive your results and will be shown how to use your nutrient reports.
Mar - May 2025	One-on-one agronomic advice.
Aug - Oct 2025	Sampling for plant tissue testing.

9. When will my paddocks be sampled?

Sampling by experienced samplers and do-it-yourself (DIY) soil sampling occurs during summer – from late November to mid 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 late-February or early-March 2025. 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.

11. When do I have to pay?

An invoice will be sent by DPIRD after your property is sampled. Payment is required by **February 2025**, and must be received before you attend the workshop or receive your results.

12. When will workshops be held?

In late-February or early-March 2025 – it is a requirement of the program that you attend this workshop. You may also be invited to an optional workshop in spring 2025 (subject to availability).

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 discounts, 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 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 (mid-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 would like a contractor to sample my property, but 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 to 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.

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?

The standard agronomic test is used, which includes: pH (acidity), phosphorus, potassium, sulphur, organic carbon, ammonium, nitrate, electrical conductivity, soil texture, plus phosphorus buffering index.

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

22. Why aren't you measuring subsoil acidity?

Subsoil acidity is not measured. The validated national soil test critical values for pasture production are based on a soil test depth of 0-10cm and include pH. Reaching the recommended target pH of 5.5 in CaCl may result in a slow pH change below the 0-10 cm sampling depth.

Sampling

23. 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 2024 and mid-January 2025 (exact timing will depend on your location and sampler availability). You will be provided with sampling equipment and assistance to sample up to 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.

Over 75% 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 2024 and January 2025 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.

24. 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).

25. 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 (this is a one-time discount). The equipment cost will be discounted by \$50 for every paddock you sample and submit for analysis. The maximum discount available is \$600, which is the value of the kit.

The sampling kit will contain an auger, pogo stick, bucket, pen, infographic and clip board (drill and batteries are 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.

26. 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 may 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.

27. 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 2024.
- Assistance from an experienced sampler on your property, where you will be offered help to sample up to 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.

28. 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 equipment may be available to borrow from your local catchment officer in the future.

29. 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

30. 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.

31. 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 1900 farmers working to improve water quality in our local waterways and estuaries.

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

A sampling map that shows the farm boundary, paddock boundaries and names is essential, as 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!

33. 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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