**Soil Health Testing**

Soil health is a hot topic right now at many university and industry meetings. Over the past 30 years AGVISE has offered new soil testing methods to our customers as they are developed by researchers. Two examples are the soil chloride test in the 1980’s and soil carbonate test in the 90’s. Right now there are a couple of soil health methods that are being evaluated by researchers and industry.

AGVISE has been offering the CO2 burst (Solvita) test for the past two years and we are now offering the Haney suite of tests as well. These new testing methods are trying to include the biology of soil along with traditional soil testing methods to improve fertilizer recommendations.

Right now it is hard to know how these new “Soil Health” tests might be used in production agriculture in the future. Soil health can be defined in several ways. One thing we can all agree on are the basic components of soil health. One component of soil health is reducing soil erosion to keep the soil in place. Reducing tillage is another component of soil health which allows the biology to not be disturbed. Having plants growing on the soil as long as possible each year, allows the biology to be more active for more days each year. We also know that growing different crops (various grasses and legumes) along with cover crops allows the biology of the soil to be more diverse (bacteria vs fungi etc.). All of these practices are recognized as components of soil health.

The million dollar question is will the soil health testing methods being developed right now be correlated with long term yield increases and farmer profitability. The jury is still out on that question. For the next several years, the NRCS is evaluating the Haney suite of tests as an enhancement in the CSP program. At the same time, several university researchers are evaluating the Haney and Solvita tests to determine if these tests will help growers make better fertilizer decisions. Right now we can use these soil health tests to compare fields with different tillage practices, rotations and cover crops history. In a few years, we will have research from several regions which will help us know if these tests can help us make better fertilizer recommendations for farmers. AGVISE is currently offering the CO2 burst (Solvita) biological activity test and the Haney suite of tests. Hopefully future research will show us how these tests or other tests not even thought of yet, will help us make better fertilizer recommendations for farmers everywhere.