**Amending vs. Fertilizing**

While it seems like a no-brainer for the seasoned farmer, all too often the basics can be overlooked. It is in understanding and practicing the basics that money is saved and the best crop is grown.

I have to recommend you get a complete soil test done, including organic matter. Is a soil test the end all be all to a fertility program – no. However, it is the foundation for building a plan to manage the health and fertility of your soil and crops. Getting testing done before fall gives you the time needed to make critical decisions regarding amending and fertilizing, ultimately helping you to get the most financially and environmentally from your fertility program.

The basic definitions are–

**Amendments** are used to change the physical & chemical properties of a soil. It is a long-term project that should be carried out over the course of several months if not years. The soil was not created overnight nor will you be able to change it overnight. Soil wants to inherently go back to the characteristics of its parent material. Typically we are growing crops that require a different set of parameters such as pH. Hence, we are constantly making adjustments to the chemical properties of the soil we're farming to ensure we will get the best yield or nutritional value possible. Typically, amendments are applied over a broad scale, like in the case of raising or lowering the pH of a given field.

Some amendments, as in the case of Biochar, have long-term fertility consequences that need to be considered. Understanding the why, how, and where you are using an amendment and basing it on your soil conditions and type, before using it in a fertility program will ensure you get the most benefit fromit.

Some amendments include limes, aragonite, greensand, mulch, manures, composts, elemental sulfur, peat, coir, rice hulls, biochar, gypsum, Azomite, and cover crops.

**Fertilizers** are intended to feed the individual crop/plant. Given the source of fertilizer, you can feed and encourage the biology of the soil as well. The right source, rate, time, and placement are critical to ensuring optimal plant use, nutrition, and yields. Fertilizing should be done strategically to reap the most benefit for the crop and help reduce the expense.

Some common natural or organic fertilizers are blood meal, feather meal, peanut meal, corn gluten, crab meal, fish, kelp, manures, bone char/meal, sul-po-mag, sodium nitrate, Epsom salts, kelp, etc.

Both can look very similar and follow similar principles for application. Having a soil test and the understanding of why, how, and where you are using them can save you money. Having an understanding of the basic concept of their intended use can lead to a more efficient and effective fertility program, ultimately making your farm more sustainable.