



Our Mission: To promote and implement the 4Rs of nutrient stewardship (right source, right place, right time, right rate) to minimize environmental impact, optimize harvest yield and maximize nutrient utilization.

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Ag Retailer in Action: Fred Butt, United Prairie, Crescent City, IL

Fred Butt is a Sales Agronomist with United Prairie in Crescent City, Illinois. He is a Western Illinois graduate with a degree in Agronomy, and has been working in the central and eastern parts of Iroquois County since 1988. Fred is an active IFCA member and is also a Certified Crop Adviser (CCA), a member of the second ever class to receive their CCA 25 years ago.



This past winter, Fred noticed that at many of the meetings that there was an increased focus on 4Rs and water quality. With the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy having been released this past year, there has been an immense effort made by IFCA and others to get the message out on the importance of implementing practices to reduce nutrient losses. The other thing Fred noticed was the positive response from several farmers in his area. “After hearing Jean Payne’s presentation this winter, there were several growers who attended that meeting who got the message. They all spoke on how we all need to be thinking about what we’re doing in the field and the potential consequences.”

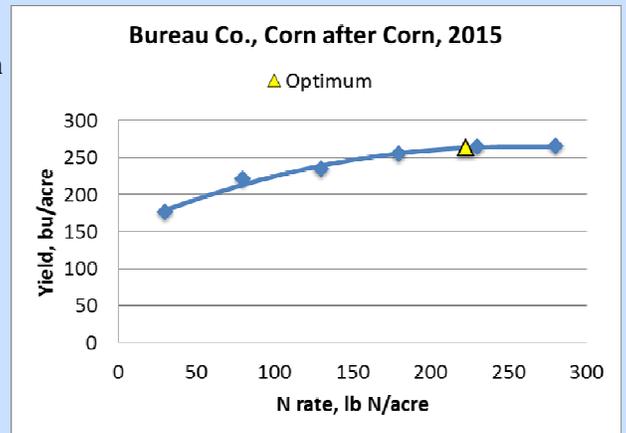
One of the main changes that was obvious to Fred was the willingness of growers to start using N-Serve in the spring for the first time. Despite the challenge of some farm managers not wanting to spend the extra money or the unknown of not having used a N stabilizer before, many of the growers Fred spoke to were still more than willing to make the investment to protect their nitrogen. As Fred says, “There has been pretty good awareness about trying to match their nitrogen application to their expected yield goals, and they are willing to go the extra mile to protect that applied N.” Many of the producers made several passes with a nitrogen stabilizer either with their pre-plant ammonia or top dress urea this spring. They are eager to see the results later in the year, but in the meantime are just happy that they are doing something to help keep the nutrients in the field. As Fred put it, “They are willing to put in the extra work to try and make a positive impact both financially and environmentally.”

United Prairie has also taken the initiative of participating in and hosting their own research trials. Jeff Brown, Agronomy Manager for United Prairie, has been working on several projects regarding nutrient management. They conduct research on their Concept Farm in Sadorus, Illinois, where they are also participating in their 2nd N Rate Trial. They also have several producers that they work with that are participating in N Rate Trials on their own farms. Within these N Rate Trials, they are also using N-WATCH to determine the amount of ammonium and nitrate in the soil in the various N rate strips.

“IFCA and Illinois Ag Retailers have done a great job of addressing the issues at hand and working towards improvement. My philosophy is that if somebody has a question, try to answer it as honestly as you can. All of us have to try and reach out and somehow tell our stories. We need to continue to do the right thing as an industry.”
– Fred Butt

Keep it 4R Crop Showcases N Rate Results

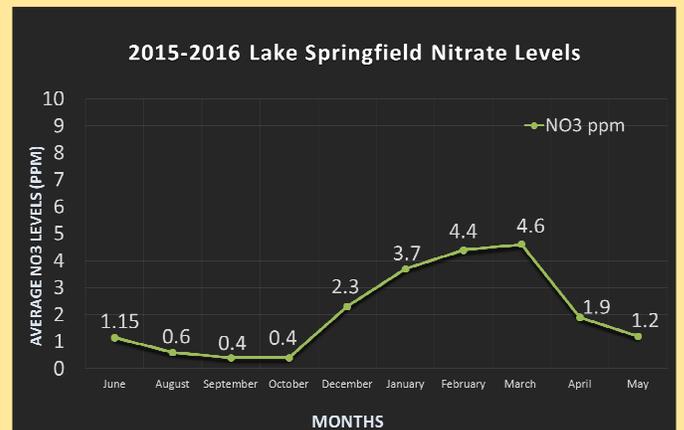
See for yourself what farmers learned from their participation in NREC funded nitrogen rate trials in 2014 and 2015. Working with the University of Illinois, IFCA has posted the optimum nitrogen rates determined from various N rate trials throughout the state. Go to www.ifca.com, click on “Keep it 4R Crop Tools” and then on “N Rate Trials.” It’s easy to navigate the screen to select a N rate icon and reveal the response curves that the farmers themselves received. The goal of the N Rate program is to continue to improve the MRTN (a key activity in the INLRS) and provide farmers with a reliable and defensible tool to help them with the “right rate” in their individual fields. NREC funds this research.



Keeping a Close Eye on Nitrogen in the Soil and Water

As we reported in the Winter 4R newsletter, the warm fall and winter has resulted in an earlier than normal conversion of applied ammonium (NH_4) to nitrate (NO_3) in the soil.

Winter rainfall also posed a challenge, with surface water runoff reaching the lakes. By staying in close contact with our water supply friends, IFCA educated our members in the priority watersheds about the levels of N that were in the surface water lakes and there was reason for concern (see Lake Springfield nitrate levels in the chart). Despite some reports that 50-60 lbs of N had already been lost by late March, ag retailers utilized N-WATCH to see for themselves, saw that the applied N was still in place in the soil, and urged farmers to not apply any additional N prior to planting but take a “wait and see” approach instead.



This turned out to be excellent advice and has been corroborated by Dr. Nafziger at UI whose NREC funded project evaluated on-farm N-WATCH results as well as sampling performed at University farms. In the May 6, 2016 UI Bulletin, he stated “*Even after subtracting an amount of N in soils without fertilizer, most or all of the N applied as fertilizer last fall was recovered in mid-April sampling. For the three on-farm sites, about half of the recovered N was in ammonium form. The amount of N recovered from three on-farm sites with similar soils in April 2015 was similar to what we found this year, but last spring only about one-third of the recovered N was in the ammonium form. Given the difference between the two winters it’s surprising that more of the N was in the ammonium form this year, but we can take it as good news.*” We will continue to keep a close eye on soil ammonium and nitrate levels and with the crop in the ground, nutrient utilization should begin in earnest. This example of combining awareness with sound science and communication is the foundation of the IFCA Keep it 4R Crop Program and our goal to pay equal attention to the economic needs of our farmers, protect our environment and assure social responsibility for nutrient use.



CONGRATULATIONS to the Certified Crop Advisers who took the 4R Specialty exam in August 2016. It was a difficult exam and not everyone was successful but there are now 100 4R Certified Nutrient Management Specialists in the United States, and nearly half of them (42) live and advise farmers here in Illinois. During the winter of 2015/2016, IFCA and the IL CCA program joined forces to provide classroom training, study materials and webinars to help prepare Illinois CCAs for the exam. NREC helped to fund this educational effort and the Illinois Soybean Association assisted with preparing and hosting the webinars. We are very proud of our Illinois CCAs!