



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.

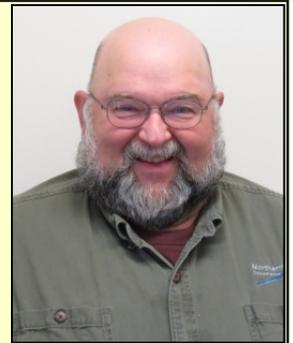
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Ag Retailer in Action: *Kevin Nelson, Northern Partners Co-op, Mendota Illinois*

The Importance of a Trusted Advisor

Kevin Nelson is a life-long Ag Professional. After receiving an Ag Business degree from Joliet Junior College, he worked at a soil testing firm and in the seed business before joining the ag retail industry. He is currently the Precision Agronomist for Northern Partners Co-op (NPC) located in Mendota, IL. His responsibilities include working with all of the NPC branch agronomists as well as managing their precision data systems.



Kevin has been a Certified Crop Adviser since 1994 and he's seen a lot of changes—for the better. One major change Kevin has witnessed (and that he played a major role in) has been the adoption of 4R practices. Aside from farmers wanting to hold off to apply fall anhydrous until the soil temperatures fall to the recommended level, Kevin says that split applications of nitrogen have been the biggest change in the last 5 years. "Five years ago, almost all fall anhydrous was full rate with N-Serve. Now, upwards of 80% of NPC customers are going with only a half rate of nitrogen in the fall, plus N-Serve" Kevin stated. The rest of the nitrogen is being applied in the spring via herbicide pre-plant or side-dressed. With the always unpredictable Illinois weather, this "spoon-feeding" approach can be pivotal in reducing nitrogen loss.

This change in farmer perspective is an encouraging sign to Kevin. As he notes, "We at NPC have been working on fertilizer efficiency for a long time, purchasing our first strip till bar in the early 1990's so this is nothing new. But putting it into a 4R perspective is new, and helps with the importance of the message to farmers" he said. "When the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy was announced, NPC agronomists paid close attention to the practices being discussed in the strategy so we could share this all with our customers." NPC has taken the IFCA 4R Code of Practice Pledge and Kevin himself will be taking the 4R exam to become 4R certified this upcoming February.

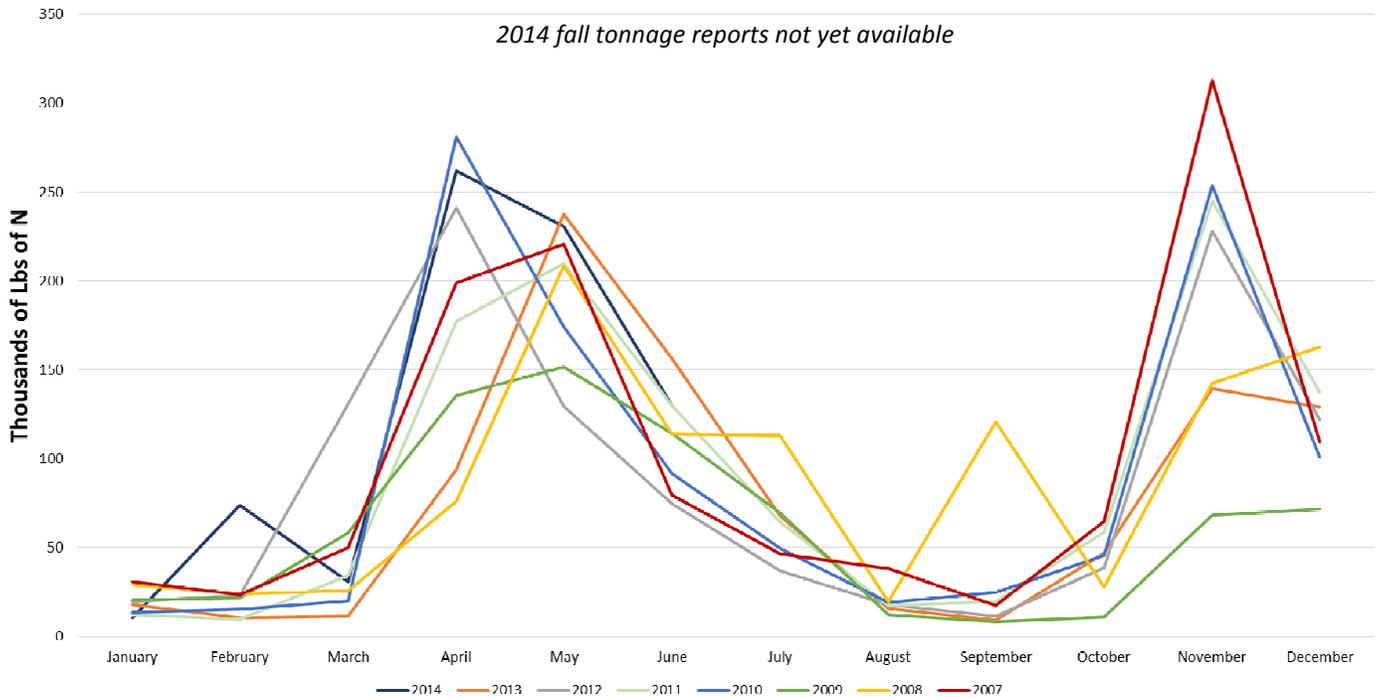
But this all raises the question: *Why have so many farmers decided to take a 4R approach to managing their nitrogen?* The answer is that farmers look to their trusted advisers—experts like Kevin and his team. When agronomists at NPC began to see positive results with split applying nitrogen, the program and trust in the system grew rapidly. Kevin believes that the long-term answer for overall sustainability, nutrient efficiency and the health of the field exists in many of the practices the 4R Code of Practice promotes. Says Kevin, "Farmers see the positives of incorporating a 4R approach to farming and have been sharing it with their neighbors. It is a process that is catching on, and must continue to flourish in this very important window of time that we have been given in the nutrient loss reduction strategy."

"It's about doing the things that we can and know we should do to be more sustainable. Being able to look a customer in the eye and say that this will be better for you in the long run—and having that trust—it's everything." – Kevin Nelson

4R Fall Nitrogen Stewardship Message Heard and Followed by Retailers and Farmers

Whenever harvest is early, the next task at hand is fall fertilizer application. This year, IFCA anticipated that many would be anxious to start applying anhydrous ammonia as the fields emptied of crops in early October. IFCA and the farm groups sent messages to the retailers and farmers encouraging everyone to hold off on fall ammonia application until soil temps began to fall; it was a challenge because cooler soils didn't occur until well into November. The vast majority of retailers and farmers heeded the 4Rs and held off until temps were appropriate. We continue as an industry to make tremendous strides with voluntary efforts to reduce nutrient losses. If you look at the chart below, you can see that our peak year for fall N application was 2007. Since then, we have reduced fall nitrogen rates and increased split applications. We have also significantly increased the utilization of N-Serve™ (a nitrification inhibitor) in fall applied ammonia. The 4R message has been consistent and the industry has made great strides. Ammonia terminals have been able to keep up with demand due to reduced rates in the fall, another 4R milestone.

Total N Sold in Illinois By Month from 2007-2014



The 2015 Crop Year: It Was Wet—And Yet We Had Good Nutrient Utilization



Dan Schaefer stands in a field in Sangamon County, where 0 lbs of nitrogen was applied in this on-farm research plot. This illustrates why NREC provides \$1000 to farmers for doing these trials to help recoup their lost yield for participating in this research. Waist-high corn is not what farmers like to see in September! In 2015, 52 farmers participated in these N rate trials, and after 4 straight years of the N Rate Trial program, the U of I is getting close to using all of this information to improve the N rate recommendations in the watersheds, based on the optimum N rates these trials reveal in these fields.

In addition to N rate trials, N-WATCH showed that by the end of August, less than 5 ppm of nitrate remained in the upper foot and 2nd foot of the soil. Despite an extremely wet year, the crop utilized much of the nitrogen, especially where drainage was adequate and where nitrogen was split applied. Yields have amazed many, showing us once again the power of nutrient utilization in protecting water quality. Lakes Springfield, Decatur and Bloomington enjoyed low nitrate levels all year, and in Lake Vermilion where nitrates were an issue this spring and summer, CBMP and IFCA embarked upon a special emphasis program where ag retailers brought in special phosphate fertilizer (0-46-0) for this watershed to reduce the nitrogen applied in dry fertilizer applications.

The 4R Pledge Gains Momentum! As of mid November, **70** ag retailers and crop advisers have taken the 4R Pledge to educate their customers on the 4R Code of Practice. The Code states they will educate and make recommendations that meet both agronomic and nutrient loss reduction goals. Check out these ag retail and CCA leaders at www.Keepit4RCrop.org and click on “Who’s Taken the Pledge.” These leaders advise for thousands of acres!