

The Selling of “Seed Placed” Starters

The question was asked below, if I didn't think seed placed starters should be sold that way, how would I rather see them sold?

The original post stated that 5 gallons of this recommended product was all that was needed for corn production. In some cases that may be true, for a while. So how would I sell them?

Okay, let's recognize that most fertilizer dealers are "scared to death" of seed placed starters! No need to be! Universities, including Purdue, Ohio State, Michigan State, University of Wisconsin, University of Illinois, Iowa State, University of Minnesota, University of Guelph (in Ontario) were researching them as early as the 60's. Most stopped researching them long ago, because they weren't seeing yield increases., but a few have continued to this day.

Most of them have established what makes a safe one, and I will discuss this below. Many of the fertilizer plants that are "scared to death" of seed placed starters have seen, or heard, of someone who experienced damage. I have seen it, too. But it is time they got their head out of the sand, and learned what makes a safe one. Used properly, they can be a tool to enhance yield. Used incorrectly, the seed placed products can ruin a crop. No different than the products that are being used everyday! Just a different concept!

First of all, most seed placed starters attempt to be low salt because "that is what most of the industry thinks makes a good seed placed starter". "That makes it safe to put into contact with the seed, therefore it will be taken up sooner than if it was placed beside the row a couple of inches."

That's the beginning of the pitch..., but it ignores the other aspect of safety: "nitrogen source". If a seed placed starter has a significant amount of "Urea" you could still have a safety issue. This is one of the things most of the Universities caution about in seed placed products. That rules out most 9-18-9, 8-19-3, and 9-19-3 products. There are other finished products out there to be careful of, but these 3 come to mind first, particularly if you soils tend to be sandy, or light textured.

The original article is titled "Tell me about liquid 6-18-18". Actually there isn't enough information to know for sure what is being proposed. We know that the soil tests are in the area of 15ppm (or 30#) of Phosphorous, and 100ppm (or 200#) of potash.

For the growing of corn, the potash reading given is of more concern to me than is the Phosphorous reading given. Unless the soil is a sand soil, I usually would consider that to be a minimum amount of potash to support a good corn crop, not something that could be supported long term with a 6-18-18 (or 3-18-18) product. So we probably need to use a continuous potash program in addition to the liquid product.

Our Universities have long told us that 20ppm (or 40#) of Phosphorous is enough to grow 97% of our corn yield potential in any given field. At that point something else is limiting your yield. So a reading of 15ppm (or 30#) is probably enough to take a crop for several years before getting in trouble. Again, long term it will need some attention, we just don't know how long term.

I'm usually more comfortable with readings for "P" of 25ppm (or 50#), or above. I'm also very much aware that some soils have a tremendous ability to fix Phosphorous, and to get readings much above 15ppm (or 30#) would be next to impossible. You can dump all kinds of "P" on them, and still they read low. It doesn't mean there isn't a lot of "P" in that soil, it just doesn't show up on the soil test. It comes down to knowing a bit about the soil you are working with. Also, what extractant was used to get that reading?

We need to know what type of soils he has, although I suspect I already know within a range. We need to know a little about his farming operation, and does he plant early, or later in the planting season, conventional till, no-till, or strip-till? Does he plant early, medium, or full season hybrids? Where is his soil pH? Does he want good average yields, or does he want to do something special with his yields?

If all he wants out of a crop is a good average yield, the program that was recommended to him will probably work fine for years to come, if he pays attention to the potash.

If he wants to do something special with his crop, then the seed placed starter could be an excellent part of an over-all good fertility program. In the 100's of trials of starter fertilizer that I have run 10-34-0 liquid at 15 gallons placed 2" x 2" usually doesn't beat the "check" treatment more than about 57% of the time. Most dry starters don't beat the "check" much more often than 53% of the time. Almost, might as well broadcast them.

Some seed placed starters (about 75-80% of them) have a hard time beating the "check" at all! Some of the better ones beat the "check" up to 87% of the time.

I was at a customer's office in the "Thumb" of Michigan the other day and the question was asked, "What's the difference between your product and Brand "X" 's product? My reply was "The difference is, I put my product through the planter on your farm in replicated tests". The customer finished the sentence for me.... "He read about it in a book somewhere." Unfortunately, that is the truth in too many cases. Most seed placed products have a lot of theory behind them, but little research beyond the book!

So, here is how the customer does something special: 1) Maintain a good over-all fertility program, 2) Use a "better" seed placed product to enhance the root system for better nutrient uptake.

Seed placed products also work well for those people doing the above who don't want to spend all their time refilling fertilizer tanks, or hoppers.

They also work well for those whose planters have the ability to hold 200 acres of seed.

How many times do you think they want to fill with fertilizer in a day? They, also, won't have to run back to the fertilizer plant to refill their wagon, or nurse tank a couple of times a day. A good one will not rust up that new planter, or finish rusting out an old one.

Seed placed starters can be an excellent tool for those who are no-tilling. They help get those plants off to an early start for the cooler soils. Anyone who plants early can utilize a good seed placed product.

Seed placed starters are convenient. That alone is what sold 10-34-0 liquid. We knew 10-34-0 was more expensive, but it sure was convenient! Well, seed placed starters sure are convenient. You only need to fill ½ to 1/3 as often, and if you do the proper job of choosing, they can give you several bushels of extra yield, even at high fertility levels. That helps pay for them.

Some work we did at Michigan State University over a 3 year period of time, gave us an average of 24.4 BPA gain for the 3 year period. That was on fairly high fertility fields giving us yields as high as 260 BPA in some cases. So they don't stop performing just because you have high fertility. Side placing, or deep placing, your nutrients might stop performing at these soil levels.... but seed placing a good one doesn't need too. It just depends on what you are trying to accomplish, and how you are going about it.

Seed placing of nutrients is a tool that can allow you to do something special, that other placement methods, may not allow. It, like other things in your operation, is just a tool. It might enhance your operation, or it might not! It may be all you need, for a while, or you might need more! It depends on what you want to do with your crops!