

NCDA&CS Agronomic Division
Peak-season Soil Testing Fee
August 1, 2013



The Appropriations Act of 2013 contains a provision to implement a new soil-testing fee. Pending final approval by the Board of Agriculture, a \$4 fee will be charged for all soil samples processed by the NCDA&CS Agronomic Division during its busiest season: December through March. There will still be no fee from April through November.

Rationale:

- ❖ To improve lab efficiency by encouraging more growers to sample early, thereby fostering a more balanced sample load throughout the year
- ❖ To enhance sustainability of the soil-testing program by generating receipts that will be earmarked for lab improvements, such as automated equipment, additional peak-season personnel and computer-programming enhancements [The 2013 Appropriations Act ensures that receipts generated by the new fee will be appropriated to NCDA&CS for this purpose for FY 2014 and 2015.]

NOTE: This year, December 1st falls on a Sunday and is preceded by the Thanksgiving holidays. Wednesday, November 27th, will be the last business day of the month for the soil testing lab. Any soil **samples arriving after 6 p.m. on November 27th will be subject to the peak-season fee** because they will not be logged in and processed until December 2nd.

Sample drop offs must take place during business hours (6 a.m.–6 p.m., Mon.–Fri.). A locked gate will prevent access to the loading dock area after hours and on weekends. This change will help increase the security of samples and improve customers' access to Agronomic Division personnel.

Payment should not be placed inside shippers. By late Fall 2013, clients will have the convenience of entering sample and payment (credit card or escrow account) information online in the PALS website. **Cash and checks will be accepted for peak-season samples only if deposited in advance in an escrow account.**

Facts:

- ❖ The Agronomic Division provides a quality soil-testing service that includes comprehensive chemical soil analyses, site-specific lime and fertilizer recommendations and access to the consulting services of NCDA&CS agronomists.
- ❖ It costs NCDA&CS approximately \$3.22 to analyze one sample (based on average expenses 2008–2012), of which about \$1 is covered by receipts from the state fertilizer inspection fee and lime tonnage tax.
- ❖ For a typical 8-acre field in eastern North Carolina, we estimate that the peak-season fee will cost between \$4 and \$16, depending upon the intensity of the sampling protocol.
- ❖ Most North Carolina growers submit fewer than 50 samples per year according to 2010 data.
- ❖ Of the approximately 350,000 samples typically received each year, nearly 60 percent are analyzed from December through March, with turnaround times of up to 9 weeks.
- ❖ The vast majority of soil samples analyzed during the winter months are from farms in preparation for spring planting. Most of these samples can be collected and submitted well before December 1st, thus avoiding the fee. Nearly all soil samples associated with home & garden and landscaping projects can be collected and submitted from April through November.
- ❖ Clients who desire expedited service during the peak season can purchase NCDA&CS expedited shippers to receive a guaranteed turnaround time of ten business days. A limited number of shippers are sold each year (usually in August or September). The anticipated 2013–14 price for a 36-sample shipper is \$200.