# Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................. 1

Items Needed to Fill Out Sheets ........................................................................................................ 1

Quick Review of Nitrogen Basics .................................................................................................... 2

Farm Contact Information .................................................................................................................. 2

Field and Crop Characteristics .......................................................................................................... 3

Current and Past Manure Application .............................................................................................. 3

Fertilizer Additions ............................................................................................................................ 5

Crop Conditions ............................................................................................................................... 6

Soil Test Results .............................................................................................................................. 6

Nitrogen Balance ............................................................................................................................. 7

Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test ................................................................................................................ 8

Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test ................................................................................................................ 8

Corn Stalk Nitrate Test ..................................................................................................................... 9

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Correct citation:


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Introduction

The Nitrogen Evaluation for Corn Tool automates calculation of nitrogen (N) guidelines using information about soil type, crop rotation, legume management in the rotation, drainage and manure and fertilizer applications. In this calculator white cells (boxes) are open for data entry and yellow cells (boxes) are calculated values. The yellow cells present results based on data entered into white cells. Yellow cells are locked and cannot be manipulated. Efficient use of N is an important economic and environmental goal for many farms. Nitrogen can be difficult to manage due to its multiple and very mobile forms. Fine-tuning N management requires developing site-specific knowledge through on-farm measurements. The Nitrogen Management Evaluation Tool is a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that combines multiple tools for N management for improved understanding and evaluation of farm-specific, field-specific N conditions. The tool requires Microsoft Excel to be installed (Microsoft Office 2003® or 2007®).

Warning: Useable output requires realistic values as input variables. The quality of the output is dependent on the data used and is the responsibility of the person using the calculator.

The Nitrogen Evaluation for Corn Tool integrates four stand-alone tools:

- Cornell Corn N Guidelines
- Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test (PSNT)
- Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test (ISNT)
- Corn Stalk Nitrate Test (CSNT)

Each individual tool can be used to develop skills for accurately assessing farm-specific conditions that impact N availability and evaluating and fine-tuning decisions. Use of these tools can lead to improved N use efficiency over time.

Items Needed to Fill Out Sheets

| Farm name | Percent legume in sods when rotated into corn |
| Farm address | Sod termination timing |
| Crop year | Sod termination method |
| Field ID | Current manure application rate |
| Field size | Manure application rate last year |
| County | Manure application rate two years ago |
| Soil type | Manure type |
| Soil drainage (Y/N) | Month of application |
| Crop variety | Application method |
| Corn population density | Manure analysis |
| Row spacing | Density |
| Cover crops in rotation | Percent solids |
| Crop rotation | Percent inorganic-N |
Percent organic-N  
Percent phosphate equivalent  
Percent potash equivalent  
Fertilizer  
Percent nitrogen  
Percent phosphate  
Percent potash equivalent  
Application rate  
Density (if liquid)  
Application method  
Field Conditions  
Crop Yield  
Additional field observations  
Soil Analysis  
Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test  
Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test  
Corn Stalk Nitrate Test

**Quick Review of Nitrogen Basics**

A review of nitrogen basics is suggested by reading the two fact sheets listed below. The factsheets can be downloaded from [http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/guidelines/factsheets.html](http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/guidelines/factsheets.html).

- **Agronomy Fact Sheet #2: Nitrogen Basics – The Nitrogen Cycle.**
- **Agronomy Fact Sheet #41: Soil Organic Matter.**

**Farm Contact Information**

Proper labeling of field information as it is collected is important for tracking and linking farm management information with analysis results. This spreadsheet provides a place for Farm Name and Address, and the crop year to which the crop information and soil and plant analysis are applicable (Figure 1).

![Nitrogen Management Evaluation Tool](image)

Figure 1: Contact, identification and crop year information needed to link analysis results with farm management practices.
Field and Crop Characteristics

Field characteristics such as soil type, drainage, rotation and sod legume content are used to estimate the amount of nitrogen required to reach the optimal yield for the corn crop. Cornell nitrogen guidelines use soil type and drainage to define the corn yield potential, soil N contribution, and nitrogen uptake efficiency based on research database values. The corn yield potential, soil nitrogen, and nitrogen uptake efficiency values are used along with sod N credits in the Cornell N Guidelines for Corn equation:

\[
\text{Recommended N} = \frac{(\text{yield potential} \times 1.2 - \text{Soil N} - \text{Sod N})}{(\text{N uptake efficiency}/100)}
\]

These database values are built into the Nitrogen on Corn Evaluation Tool and are used to calculate a start-of-year N need for the field. The values can also be found in “Nitrogen Guidelines for Field Crops in New York”, an extension document that is downloadable from http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/publications-extension/Ndoc2003.pdf.

In addition to the data needed for estimating corn N needs, crop characteristics such as population density, row spacing, and sod termination date and method help with accurate interpretation of sampling results. When these data are combined with Field ID and field size, producers and advisors can work together to develop field specific guidelines (Figure 2).

Current and Past Manure Application

Manure application information is collected for the current growing season and the past two growing seasons (Figure 3). This information allows estimation of the manure N credits for the current corn crop.
Manure application information is requested per growing season. A growing season is the time between the harvest of the last crop and the end of the growth of the next crop (i.e., September or October of 2010 to September or October of 2011 for the 2011 growing season) (Figure 4).

The manure applied in the current growing season can be a source of \textit{inorganic} N depending on timing and application methods. The calculator uses the manure analysis, manure rate, timing and application method to calculate the amount of inorganic N to be credited (Table 1).

Manure applied in the current and past two growing seasons supplies the current crop with N from mineralization of the \textit{organic} N in the manure. Nitrogen credits from the organic fraction depend on the species of animal that the manure came from, the solids content of the manure and the manure application rate (Table 2).
Table 1: Estimated ammonia-N losses as affected by manure application method*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manure Application Method</th>
<th>Ammonium-N Credited</th>
<th>Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Injected as sidedress on row crops</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring incorporated within 1 day</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Incorporated within 2 days</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Incorporated within 3 days</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Incorporated within 4-5 days</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topdressed or incorporated after 5 days</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall incorporated or injected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface application on frozen or saturated ground</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2: Decay series for stable organic N in manure by animal type. A “last year release rate” of 12% indicates that an estimated 12% of the organic N applied in the manure is expected to be utilized by the crop a year after application*.

Release rate for organic N in manure (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Total Solids (%)</th>
<th>Present Year “Decay_current”</th>
<th>Last Year “Decay_lastyr”</th>
<th>Two Years Ago “Decay_2yrs”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cows</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows</td>
<td>≥18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>≥18</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swine</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swine</td>
<td>≥18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>≥18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>≥18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Fertilizer Additions**

Information on pre-plant, starter, and sidedress fertilizer treatments are important for determining where additional fertilizer may be needed or where fertilizer savings can be made. The data needed in the calculator are the fertilizer analysis (N:P₂O₅:K₂O), rate (in lbs/acre or gallons/acre), the density (for liquid fertilizers), and method of application (Figure 4). This information is used to calculate how many pounds of each nutrient are applied:
Pounds per gallon * gallons per acre = pounds per acre

Pounds per acre * percent nutrient = pounds of nutrient per acre

In addition, information on the how/when it was applied is collected as a reference when evaluating N management practices later in the season (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Fertilizer analysis, rates and application methods are needed to identify potential areas where additions or reductions in fertilizer could be made.

**Crop Conditions**

Conditions in the field during crop development can impact nutrient dynamics during the growing season. Therefore it is important to keep notes and field observations to help interpretation and evaluation of soil and tissue testing results (Figure 5). Additional field information to track for N availability includes rainfall events and temperature.

Figure 5: The ISNT/CSNT calculator provides a place to record observation of field conditions during the growing season to aide in evaluation later on.

**Soil Test Results**

The calculator provides a place to record soil analysis results that relate directly to N availability (ISNT and PSNT) as well as other soil nutrient levels that could interact with plant uptake of nitrogen (Figure 6). Recording all soil analysis results allows the most comprehensive interpretation of N availability during the growing season.
Figure 6: Nutrient analysis results are recorded and when combined with additional field conditions listed in previous sections allows a comprehensive evaluation of nitrogen availability during the growing season.

**Nitrogen Balance**

Keeping track of the nitrogen balance prior to and during the growing season can help estimate the quantity of fertilizer or manure needed at planting and sidedress time. According to the information entered in the spreadsheet on soil type, drainage, crop rotation, percent legume in the previous sod and manure and fertilizer additions the N balance for this field shows a 26 lb/acre deficient remaining (Figure 7).

![Table](image)

**Figure 7:** Corn nitrogen balance is calculated based on information entered in the calculator.

The preliminary N need is calculated using the Cornell Nitrogen Guidelines for Corn equation:

\[ \frac{(Yield\ potential\ of\ the\ soil \times 1.2 - SoilN - SodN)}{(N\ uptake\ efficiency\ of\ the\ soil/100)} \]
Then, past manure credits are subtracted to give the ‘Preliminary N Need’ at the beginning of the cropping season. Filling in the equation using the information shown in Figure 7 would provide:

\[
\frac{(168-70-30)}{0.75} - 12 = 78 \text{ lbs N/acre}
\]

Since the beginning of the growing season the corn crop has already received manure and starter fertilizer. The Preliminary N Need is subtracted to give the corn N balance:

\[
(22+30) - 78 = -26 \text{ lbs of N/acre}
\]

The crop is still short about 26 lbs of N per acre.

**Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test**

The Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test (PSNT) is an in-season soil nitrate test that can be used to estimate where additional fertilizer may not be needed. This test is taken at corn sidedressing time just before the period of major N demand by corn. It should be used on fields with a history of manure and/or sod incorporation and cannot be used on fields that received N beyond 30 lbs N/acre in the starter band. The PSNT is designed to (1) estimate the soil’s N supplying potential from organic N sources, and (2) decide if that is enough N to meet crop needs.

Field T1580.3a shown in Figure 8 received a PSNT value of 21 (this value was entered in the soil test results section above and in the evaluation table is marked with an ‘x’ and highlighted in yellow) (Figure 8).

![Figure 8: PSNT results are highlighted in the PSNT evaluation table and marked with an ‘x’](image)

**Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test**

The Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test (ISNT) estimates the amount of readily mineralizable soil organic N and when coupled with the organic matter levels in the soil (loss-on-ignition (LOI)) the ISNT-N value can be used to determine if a field is likely or unlikely to respond to additional N (i.e. if the soil has sufficient mineralizable N to not need external supplies in the form of fertilizer N).
For example, Field T1580.3a shown in Figure 9 reports 2.5% LOI and an ISNT-N value of 375 ppm, indicating only a small starter N application is needed.

![Illinois Soil Nitrogen Test (ISNT) Evaluation Table]

Figure 9: ISNT x LOI results show that field T1580.3a falls above the critical value line and is likely to not need extra N (beyond a 20-30 lbs of starter N).

**Corn Stalk Nitrate Test**

The CSNT is useful as an end-of-season test for evaluation of the N supply during the growing season because it helps identify opportunities for reducing fertilizer inputs or re-allocation of manure. If the field had a CSNT greater than 2000 ppm, the crop received more than enough N that growing season. If the field had a CSNT between 750 and 2000 ppm the crop was supplied with adequate N to reach full yield potential. If the CSNT of the field was under 750 and 250 ppm the plants had marginal access to N and if the field tests below 250 the crop did not receive enough N or the plants could not access the N that was supplied (other limiting nutrients, water logged conditions, high losses etc…).

![Corn Stalk Nitrate Test (CSNT) Evaluation Table]

Figure 10: Corn Stalk Nitrate results are graphically displayed in the N evaluation tool.