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Spring 2017 Fertilizer Dates and Rules for Small Grains and Commodity Cover Crops Announced

ANNAPOLIS, MD (Feb. 8, 2017) – The Maryland Department of Agriculture today announced that farmers who planted small grains for harvest may “top dress” these crops with commercial fertilizer beginning February 15 as long as ground conditions remain favorable. The determination follows Maryland’s nutrient management regulations and applies to all farmers growing small grains, including those enrolled in the commodity option of the department’s Cover Crop Program. In all instances, manure applications are restricted until March 1.

“According to University of Maryland researchers, soil temperature and crop growth indicate that these small grains have absorbed all available nutrients in the soil and now require additional nutrients to keep growing,” said Secretary Joe Bartenfelder.

“Based on research that I have conducted in the past, I have determined that once wheat or barley accumulates 350-400 Growing Degree Days from January 1, both crops may benefit from the first application of spring nitrogen,” explained Dr. Robert Kratochvil, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist at the University of Maryland.

According to the researchers, the warm winter resulted in an accumulation of Growing Degree Days, which are used to estimate the growth and development of plants during the growing season. The University recommends split applications of spring nitrogen with the first application occurring on or soon after February 15 based on the Growing Degree Days accumulation and the second application when the crops begin to joint.

For additional information on the department’s cover crop requirements, farmers should contact their local soil conservation district or the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program at 410-841-5864. Questions about winter nutrient applications should be directed to the Nutrient Management Program at 410-841-5959. Farmers with fields that are not suitable for harvest should contact their crop insurance agent for guidance.

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