REFLECTIONS FROM 23 YEARS IN FERTILISER INDUSTRY

Warwick Catto

Ballance Agri-Nutrients, Tauranga

Over the past 20 years there has been slow but significant change within the fertiliser industry. This change covers the progression from a number of regional fertiliser SSP based companies to today's duopoly. The fertiliser products supplied have not changed significantly in terms of base products but the complexity of blends continues to increase as farmers and advisors move to more site specific advice. This is now being taken further and depending on the integration and ease of use of technologies will accelerate putting pressure onto logistic and service providers.

Product use has seen a dramatic increase in nitrogen use in the diary sector. The views often espoused about nitrogen today by dry stock farmers was typical of dairy farmers in the early 1990's. The expected increase in N use by dry stock farmers will create some tensions about nutrient loads from farm systems depending on how water quality or N leaching is considered at the farm level.

The external drivers will now focus the industry on efficiency of fertiliser use in terms of the external effects, namely greenhouse gas and nutrient loss from farms.

Finally, scribbling a fertiliser recommendation on a soil test is no longer adequate today even if the product recommendation is the same the context of its use and defensibility has created a huge increase in workload for fertiliser advisors.

Although often seen as a mature industry the fertiliser industry is continuing to innovate and morph as farms and wide stakeholder expectations and needs change.

Editor's Note: An extended manuscript was not solicited for this 'reflections' paper'