

FALL VS. SPRING LIMING: WHAT IS THE BETTER CHOICE?

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When it comes to trying to alleviate soil acidity problems, any time is generally considered to be a good time to apply aglime materials. However, there are a number of factors that you may want consider when making a decision on whether to lime in the fall. In general, fall is an excellent time to make your lime applications. First of all, there is generally more time available to growers in the fall when compared to the busy spring tillage and planting season. Truckers and custom lime spreaders may also be easier to contract in the fall than in the spring. Another big advantage to fall liming is that you do not have to deal with weight limits on rural roads, which are imposed in the spring. The physical condition of the soil is generally much better in the fall than in the spring. This will be advantageous in supporting the weight of the lime spreaders and minimizing the likelihood of doing structural damage to the soil as well as getting stuck in fields. Any compaction or wheel tracking damage done in the fall will have winter freezing and thawing cycles to help alleviate some of these adverse effects.

The ideal time to apply lime is when you are coming out of the forage part of the rotation, or as far in advance of planting your most acid sensitive crop as possible. Often, lime is not applied until the end of the corn part of the rotation or just before seeding the legume. In any case, applying it in the fall will give you several extra months for the lime to react compared to a spring application. If fall tillage is done, it also gives the lime one more mixing which research has shown is critical to the effective neutralization of acid soils. Unlike fall application of nutrients such as nitrogen, there is no risk of leaching loss of lime and very minimal risk of surface loss as well due to the generally low solubility of aglime products. In summary, if soil testing has confirmed a need for reducing acidity in some of your fields, consider fall liming as a management strategy.