

## Crop Production

# Big crop prices mean micronutrients count

By P.J. GRIEKSPoor

**R**ECORD prices for wheat over the past year have made producers take a closer look at what they can do to improve yields and minimize damage from weather stress.

For Kevin Whitehair, agronomy manager for North Central Kansas Co-op in Hope, that means taking a careful look at micronutrients such as chloride as a way to get an incremental boost in wheat yields.

"The product that we handle is Amchlor Basic, which is a liquid fertilizer that mixes well in other applications," Whitehair says. "There are other sources of chloride out there, including granular potassium chloride or potash, but we have found that the mixability of liquid is an advantage."

He says the liquid ammonium chloride product mixes well with herbicides or other liquid fertilizers, and even first-time users find it easy to use.

Whitehair says the role micronutrients can play in im-

## Key Points

- High prices cause producers to reconsider micronutrients.
- Health and yields improve with added chloride.
- Managing micronutrients improves disease resistance.

proving productivity is nothing new, but it has gained attention in a time when commodity prices mean a few extra bushels can mean a lot of extra dollars.

"Higher prices just make the little bit of extra investment more appealing," he says.

## More than yields

Larry Hottman has farmed for about 25 years near Enterprise in Dickinson County. He's used liquid ammonium chloride for about four years and has seen improved yields on wheat.

Hottman does annual soil samples and has been adding about 20 pounds of chloride and 10 pounds of sulfur per acre, followed by about 80 pounds of nitrogen later on.

He says he's seen more ben-

efits than just improved yields.

"You're getting a healthier plant overall with better potential," Hottman says.

Dale Leikam, president of the Fluid Fertilizer Foundation, says micronutrients, including chloride, can reduce the impact of foliar diseases such as tan spot and leaf rust.

Curtis Stoffer, who farms about 900 acres of dryland wheat near Abilene with his son, Jason, and brother, Charles, says he has added liquid ammonium chloride to his wheat fields for about seven years.

"We're sold on it because we have a healthier plant out there, and that's been the case every year," Stoffer says.

Even in the challenging year of 2007, when an Easter weekend freeze cut yields to half of normal in much of central Kansas, Stoffer says his wheat had test weights at 58 and 59 pounds.

"We figure if we are getting 2 to 5 bushels an acre better yields, then it's a good investment," he says.



**HEALTHIER PLANTS:** Curtis Stoffer, who farms near Abilene, says he is sold on chloride fertilizer because it gives him healthier plants.



**SOIL TESTS:** Larry Hottman of Enterprise says annual soil tests persuaded him to add chloride when they showed he was low on the micronutrient.

The product works well in western Kansas as well as eastern, says Shannon Gnad, a crop consultant with Crop Vision in Pratt.

"One particular grower I work with plants about 2,000 dryland and 1,000 irrigated acres," Gnad says. "He goes with a standard 13.4-gallon-per-acre rate of Amchlor Basic for both his irrigated and dryland fields."

He says awareness of chloride deficiencies has grown significantly as higher wheat prices have made slight increases in

yields more profitable.

And, he says, chloride applications have been shown to give a "booster shot" to fields.

Gnad says those who did not apply chloride had more problems with powdery mildew in the damp 2008 season.

The general agreement seems to be that as prices go higher, the potential for profits means more producers will be able to try something more in the effort to gain yields.

*Some information in this article was supplied by Evans Enterprises in Olathe.*

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