

Organic Fertilizers – A Summer Stress Aid

by Len Conley

Summer fertility has always been a major challenge for turfgrass managers. The challenge is trying to balance the fertility requirement of the turf – with that of managing summer disease pressures. This summer was a testimonial to that fact. It was so bad this year, I heard comments from superintendents – “Don’t even bring nitrogen near my golf course!” But, there are new choices.

Over the last 6 years, I have been working with turfgrass universities evaluating the benefits of using animal protein organic fertilizers on golf courses. This type of organic fertilizer is a very slow release all natural product that offers some unique agronomic benefits. These products are hot weather safe and do not promote summer disease pressures. In fact, research has shown that turfgrass fertilized with these products has less overall disease problems.

What is an animal protein organic fertilizer? It’s a product derived from blood, feather and bone meals. These products when used in your program offers some very unique agronomic benefits. They aid in reducing your overall disease pressure, promotes excellent color & density, and enhances the stress tolerance to the turf. Research at Rutgers and Colorado State University has shown that in combination with certain groups of fungicides, disease control can actually be enhanced. This includes both summer and winter diseases.

How do these products work in the soil? These products are high in vitamins and food energy. This food energy is needed to feed the natural micro-organisms found in the soil. This food energy plus vitamin B-12, naturally found in these products, help these micro-organisms to multiply. These micro-organisms break down the product and release the nutrients to the plant. Research at Cornell and at Michigan State has shown that specific micro-organisms in the soil can aid with rooting & plant growth, decrease disease pressure and improve overall turfgrass health.

How are these products different from other organics? Products that are manure or sledge based have less food energy to feed this micro-organism complex. Hence, these products lack the consistent results if applied at lower rates. To improve results, higher application rates are used which impacts growth. Or, urea is added but this lessens the natural benefits of the product.

Overall, animal protein organic fertilizers can offer some new agronomic benefits and unique windows of application. For best results, these products can be applied at lower rates during the summer with fungicides for longer effective disease control, after aeration to promote turf recovery and rooting, and in conjunction with snow mold fungicides for enhanced control and spring color.

If after this summer you are looking for some alternatives to help manage the stresses of summer or winter, you may want to give one of these products a try. These products are sold under the trade names of Nature Safe, HHI and Ringer. For specific program ideas, you can contact these companies for their research findings and specific program recommendations.



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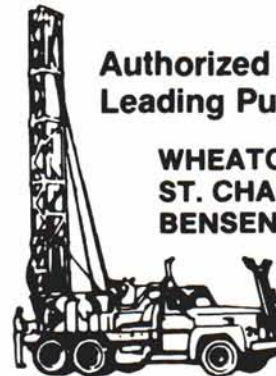
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