

PASTURE SOIL SAMPLE COLLECTION GUIDE

BEFORE SAMPLING

Create a plan. When planned correctly, it is easy to collect representative soil samples from a pasture.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED FOR SAMPLING

- A soil sampling tool; preferably a type of coring device.
- Sample-collection bags.
- Map of field(s) with sampling plan and sample labels.

GETTING STARTED

Keep in mind that you will need to sample similar areas together. It's important to divide fields into areas that are expected to have similar characteristics or that are likely to be managed differently than other parts of the pasture. If an area contains a different type of forage, has a noticeable problem, or consists of a different soil type, those areas should be sampled separately.

Natural features such as soil type and topography are important sources in variability, particularly in low-testing and unfertilized fields.

If not sampling by soil type, sample by 10-acre units. At the very least, each field or paddock should be sampled separately.

SAMPLING A PADDOCK OR FIELD

Try to avoid the following:

- Gathering a soil sample within three months after application of phosphorus fertilizer, lime, or manure.
- Sampling areas that are not representative of the field
- Sampling areas immediately surrounding urine or dung patches, near water sources, shade, mineral feeders, hay feeding areas, or any other area where animals may have congregated and created a nutrient buildup.

STEP-BY-STEP COLLECTION

1. Clearly label all sample bags prior to sample collection, being sure to include your name, field ID, and sample ID on each bag.
2. Travel across the entire area to be sampled in a zigzag pattern, randomly selecting spots to take a core. Eight to ten cores will be compiled to make one sample.
3. Sample at a depth of six to seven inches in pastures. Do not take too shallow a sample as this will overestimate the soil fertility level in your pasture.
4. Discard vegetation on top of cores, as well as soil below seven inches.
5. Combine your eight to ten cores into a single sample bag.
6. Submit sample and request form to the nearest Rock River Laboratory location.



The photo above demonstrates the portion of a soil core necessary to create a proper soil sample.

By regularly analyzing soil and following the recommendations, producers can maintain soil fertility at levels that are appropriate for optimum productivity of the pasture.

Use soil testing to determine the current pH levels of pasture soils and as the basis for lime needs. Additional information optimum pH for forages and pastures as well as estimating amounts of lime to apply can be found by searching for “pasture” at www.rockriverlab.com.

