

Farmers urged to test their soils

As can be seen from the table below the amount of lime spread by SA landowners to counter soil acidity has increased significantly since the late 1990s. However, sales dipped last financial year being about 2,000 tonnes less than in 2001/02.

LIMING STATISTICS FOR SA

Region	Area with moderate to high susceptibility to soil acidification (ha)	Est. lime applied 98/99 (tonnes)	Est. lime applied 02/03 (tonnes)
Eyre Peninsula	191,000	5,000	15,860
Northern and YP	343,000	30,000	33,100
Mt Lofty Ranges	406,000	33,400	35,250
South East	684,000	20,750	68,800
Kangaroo Island	185,000	11,000	13,800

(Note: the figures for the Mt Lofty Ranges and South-East contain a component of interstate sales as some suppliers do not differentiate between local and interstate sales.)

These figures have been provided by senior land management consultant with Rural Solutions SA, Brian Hughes.

“By region last year, there was a slight decrease in lime sales in the Mt Lofty Ranges and on Eyre Peninsula; an increase in the south-east, while sales in other regions were static,” he said.

“Interestingly there are reports of more sales to the Murraylands – a region where we estimate there are 90,000 ha of land with some susceptibility to soil acidification but one which has not historically been the target for lime spreading.

“Obviously some landowners there are having pH tests done and finding out they need to apply lime.”

Mr Hughes urged landowners to continue to monitor their soil pH levels – the longer term aim in cropping situations being to keep soil pH (as measured in calcium chloride) at about 5.5, and for pastures 5.0 to 5.5. He said accelerated soil acidity due to agricultural activities such as applying nitrogenous fertilisers, using leguminous pastures and harvesting grain and fodder, was causing productivity decline on many farms.

“Rates of acidification have increased significantly with increases in the productivity and intensity of cropping,” Mr Hughes said. “The use of liming material is the only practical way of balancing the acidification.”

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