Worrying stats on lime useage

While the amount of lime spread on SA farms more than doubled in the four years to 2001/02, there was a decrease in sales last financial year.

This 'dip' is both unexpected and disappointing according to senior land management consultant with Rural Solutions SA, Brian Hughes.

Mr Hughes said he had been collecting lime sales data since 1997/98 when an estimated 80,000 tonnes was sold by SA suppliers.

"This climbed to nearly 169,000 tonnes in 2001/02 but a recent survey of SA suppliers revealed sales of about 166,800 tonnes in 2002/03," he said.

"In itself the decrease of just over 2,000 tonnes is not great but across SA the annual lime application rate is only around 85 pc of what would be required to balance annual acidification on high risk soils.

"Much of this lime is being used to increase the pH of acid soils over a relatively small proportion of the area. Therefore, despite the increased use of lime since 1997/98, there are still very large areas of land that are continuing to acidify to damaging levels.

"If maximising productivity and preventing land degradation are the goals then liming is not an option in acid soil prone areas – it is an imperative.

"In these areas every time you harvest and sell grain, cut and remove hay from the property, apply nitrogenous fertiliser or grow a leguminous pasture then you run the risk of increasing soil acidity.

"These practices are of course part and parcel of modern-day farming but to balance their affect on soil pH, lime needs to be applied."

Mr Hughes said there were an estimated 1.9 million ha of arable land in SA with moderate to high susceptibility to degradation due to increasing soil acidity.

Acidity was a prime cause of reduced root growth and plant vigour which not only reduced production but could limit the type of plants grown in a rotation – canola and lucerne being examples of acidity-sensitive plants.

Next week – the areas most at risk in SA
ENDS
Bh1ok