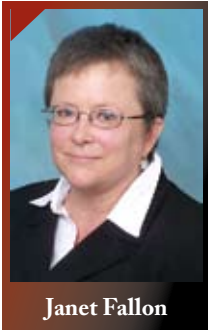


"I feel that it's important to make sure that people are up to date on the latest technology and products. Maintaining my CEUs in the different categories helps me be better rounded because you really have to understand the whole integrated process of producing a high-quality crop and protecting the environment. It's very important to have standards for the industry as a whole to abide by and to provide farmers and the nonfarm community with some reassurance that their crop consultants have the academic and experience credentials to make good recommendations."



Janet Fallon

Fallon also works with students who are in the process of building up their academic credentials. As a Cornell Alumni Admissions Ambassador, she interviews local high school students who are applying to Cornell.

"It's really a fun process because you have a chance to talk to kids who have done a lot of interesting, amazing things, and they're only 17 years old. It's frustrating when you have a kid who you really think is great, and they don't get [accepted]. There's just so much competition—nearly 30,000 applicants for 3,000 spots. It's a rewarding process, and it keeps me in touch with the university and what's going on there."

Fallon says students with ag degrees are in demand as many industry employers say it's increasingly difficult to find new employees who have one. And certification can help a recent graduate stand out from all of the other applicants with similar degrees. ■

*NAPT working for you*

## Challenging your laboratory

By **Donald A Horneck**, extension agronomist, Oregon State University Extension Service, Hermiston, OR



As a CCA, you depend on reliable soil test results when giving advice to clients. If you want to evaluate laboratory performance, I suggest three easy ways to challenge your laboratory:

1. Ask to see its NAPT results.
2. Ask for a sample that has been already analyzed by your laboratory and resubmit it on some occasional basis.
3. Purchase a check sample from NAPT that fits the range of soil test values you normally deal with.

Most laboratories participate in an external program that helps them judge the accuracy of their data. NAPT (North American Proficiency Testing Program), operated by the Soil Science Society of America, is the premier program in North America. Checking how a laboratory performs on its NAPT samples allows you to assess its performance compared with other laboratories across the country. A laboratory will not pass with 100% accuracy, but it should perform well.

A great way to test your laboratory yourself is to ask it for the return of one of the samples you have submitted. You could do the same thing by keeping part of the sample as collected for later submission, but there is always uncertainty about how well the sample is mixed, dried, stored, etc. Using the sample that the lab has dried, ground (mixed), and analyzed allows for a more unbiased sample. When lots of samples are submitted, it also allows you to choose a sample that has values of concern to you. This sample needs to be requested from the laboratory shortly after analysis, as many only store their analyzed samples for a short time. Small portions of a requested sample that has been dried and mixed can then be re-submitted at a later date or sent to another lab for comparison.

Purchasing a prepared sample ([www.naptprogram.org/soilsale](http://www.naptprogram.org/soilsale)) from NAPT is relatively inexpensive (roughly \$50). Dr. Janice Kotuby-Amacher, NAPT Coordinator, can help you get a soil that has the characteristics commonly observed in your soil tests (call 435-764-7643 or email [jkotubymendel.usu.edu](mailto:jkotubymendel.usu.edu)).

Interpretation of analyses from the same sample is not always easy. First think about agronomic range and then sample variability. Fertilizer recommendations come in three broad classes (Yes, Maybe, or No) as to fertilizer requirements. When a sample analysis gives a "Yes" one time and a "No" the next, variability is too high. When the samples keep coming back "Yes" even though there is a 100% variance, the analysis is still good; e.g., 1 ppm, 2 ppm, and 3 ppm for three consecutive analyses, though having a high CV%, the analysis is acceptable. Second, when an analysis is in the medium or high range, 10% or better is a reasonable amount of variability to expect for most soil tests; results of 100 ppm, 90 ppm, and 110 ppm would be acceptable.

Challenging your laboratory lets it know you are watching, and you will both be better for it. ■

