

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use



9 February 2010

Advice and support on offer for drought-affected

Ballance Agri-Nutrients is supporting the efforts of Meat and Wool New Zealand, Dairy NZ, and the Northland Rural Support Trust to help out drought-affected farmers in their local community.

The Government has declared Northland as a medium-level drought zone with all three of Northland's districts – the Far North, Whangarei and Kaipara – affected.

A record dry November and challenging spring conditions have led to poor pasture in many areas, which has dried out further with the recent low rainfall, coupled with high winds and high temperatures.

Representatives from each of the groups, including Ballance, have been meeting regularly with local farmers to offer their support and professional advice during the dry spell. The Government has also allocated funds to the Northland Rural Support Trust to enable them to give financial support to those farmers who need it most.

'From our point of view it is difficult to watch, as there is not much in our power we can do to help farmers until the rain arrives,' says Graeme Dickeson, Area Sales Manager for Ballance Agri-Nutrients.

'In the meantime, moral support and advice is the most useful thing we can offer. We are also working one-on-one with our farmer shareholders to offer financial support during the recovery phase.'

The co-operative has been distributing fact sheets about the role fertiliser has to play in recovering from drought, and Ballance has committed to assisting shareholders and customers on an individual basis to help them with their farm recovery process when the grass gets growing again.

Ballance Head of Research and Environment, Warwick Catto, explains that recovering from a drought requires effective and strategic use of fertiliser, especially if the drought has been prolonged and has affected farm incomes.

'As soon as it rains, there is a temptation to apply nitrogen (N) fertiliser to lift pasture growth. This is not necessarily the best approach,' he says.

'From a fertiliser perspective, the key decision facing many will be whether to put on nitrogen to promote quick growth, or phosphate, potassium and sulphur (PKS) to maintain soil fertility. The choice will partly depend on cash reserves and partly on the overall fertility status of the farm.'

After a severe drought it is preferable that nitrogen applications are delayed for two weeks after it has rained as the soil has good reserves of mineralised nitrogen and pastures take time to recover.

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use



'Immediately following a drought there is a strong desire to boost pasture growth to feed stock. However, it's important to remember that nitrogen (N) enhances growth; it doesn't start it. For nitrogen to be of any use there must be some plant growth occurring when it is applied,' explains Mr Catto.

'Don't apply N fertiliser until paddocks have some pasture cover (1000 kg DM/ha). Once you have applied N, spell the paddock for four to six weeks. This will give the N time to have an effect and will also help to minimise the risk of nitrate poisoning.'

For further fertiliser advice or support contact your local Ballance Technical Sales Representative on 0800 222 090.