

A Message from Dr. Ray Ward Concerning Soil Sampling and the Digger's Hotline

Being a good steward of the land has been an underlying theme present throughout my professional career. Good stewardship principles guide how I operate our family farm, it is the cornerstone of the recommendations our laboratory provides producers and, in fact, it is the reason for the success of Ward Laboratories, Inc.

I was reminded of the importance of good stewardship recently when feathers were ruffled over a legislative bill that sought to exempt third party contractors from calling Digger's Hotline to determine the location of buried utilities before soil sampling. Most utility companies opposed the legislative bill but farmers, consultants, ag retailers, agronomists and others favored the exemption sighting the cost, time element and reporting requirements necessary to call the hotline prior to soil sampling. Ultimately, Attorney General John Bruning issued an opinion that "farmers, their employees and any third party they contract with to do routine soil sampling for agricultural purposes" do not need to call Digger's Hotline prior to taking a soil sample.

The whole issue has been a good wake up call to producers and their production partners. Soil sampling is an integral part of production agriculture, but there are some inherent risks to the process that should not be overlooked.

As good stewards of the land, we are interested in water quality, nutrient management, fertilizer application and more, all areas where soil sampling can be useful to us. But, there are issues of safety for persons taking the sample that need to be front of mind continually. Soil sampling involves poking manual or mechanical probes in the soil up to 36" deep and utility lines of all types, unknown to the sampler, may rest underneath the soil ... that can be dangerous if we are careless.

The challenges of increased production goals only magnify the safety concerns as grid sampling becomes a more popular crop production tool and more and more producers use soil sampling generated information as the basis for their nutrient management program.

I believe soil sampling is part of being good stewards, but safety and common sense should always guide our sampling. At Ward Laboratories, Inc., we are privileged to provide accurate, reliable analysis of all your agricultural sampling including soils. And, we encourage your continued safety by considering the following:

- When sampling, watch for signs indicating gas lines or other buried utilities at the edge of a field.
- Know where utility easements are located and stay away from those areas when sampling.
- Know where subsurface irrigation lines rest.
- If you are not sure where utility lines are located in your field, call Digger's Hotline and get the needed information from each utility so you can "map" the lines for use every time you sample.
- For safety sake, do not probe more than 36" deep. Ward Laboratories, Inc. recommends general soil sampling to 8" deep and subsoil nitrate tests on dryland fields to 24" deep and 36" deep on irrigated land.

As we embark on another planting season in the Great Plains, it is our sincere hope that the season is safe and productive with timely rains, necessary sunshine an absence of pests and favorable commodity prices. As always, thanks for your business and the trust and confidence you have placed in us.