

## Field Notes y. Ernie Flmt, Ph.D., CCA, Regional Specialist - Agron

## Look deeper at soil fertility

We have all heard the old say- just say that if there is a field deep". The same kind of thing may be true for some of the fields where we grow crops. which the problem of poor subsoil fertility may develop. As while the soil is well wetted to with any discussion about soil fertility the subject can get very complicated but we can at least talk about some of the basic things that influence this situation that seems to be "cropping up" more frequently these days.

When we talk about "soil fertility" the subject can vary a lot depending upon the background of those people in the discussion. For me the common sense approach to this is to include just about any factor that is present below the usual six inch sampling depths for the soil tests we conduct on a routine basis. When we broaden the subject it might include the usual things like soil pH, the levels of "macro" nutrients like phosphorous and potassium and even some of the minor or "micro" nutrients like sulfur, calcium, magnesium, zinc, boron, copper, iron, and as always "others". Another possible issue may be the presence of reniform or root knot nematodes.

Then we can stray from the standard soil test values and get into things like poor drainage, compaction, toxic root restriction zones, and issues related to land leveling and drainage improvement. The soil test may reveal the problem that has been limiting yields but the issue may involve a combination of two or more of these items.

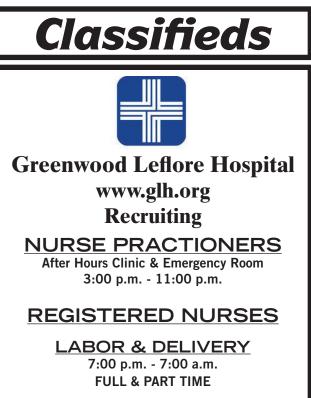
Through the years I have seen several instances of land that has been labeled as undesirable for growing crops only to see a different farmer take it and make it productive. The difference is usually nothing more than taking the time and making the effort to uncover the underlying issues and work toward correcting them. Usually there is a major issue that when corrected there may be a rapid improvement but there are often deeper problems that take years to overcome.

In recent weeks as I have visited with growers I have become aware that there are more of these isolated problem fields than I had expected. On one of the recent spring like days I visited a few of these areas and did some digging. Samples were taken at three levels from the surface to six inches, from six to twelve, and from twelve to eighteen inches. The results from the Mississippi State Soil Testing Laboratory were somewhat surprising. Some of the standard depth samples showed soil pH and nutrient levels that were well within the range I would have expected after the good yields of cotton and soybeans we had in 2016. However the deeper samples dropped dramatically. Some of these came from farms that produced some of the best yields in the region while specific fields came in with yield levels at half or less of the higher yielding fields worked by the same grower. I have used up a lot of my space in background so I will

ing that "beauty is only skin that is not pulling its weight on a farm then a few basic things should be done. Pull the three levels of soil as described above There are several situations in and submit them to the testing talk about how to deal with it. lab. Use a penetration probe but until we know what the "discheck for compaction zones.

Thanks for your time.

Kylee Killebrew, at right, is pictured with Judge Brandon Morgan and her Reserve Champion/MS Bred Champion Light Mediumweight Market Goat at the 2017 Dixie National Junior Roundup Show in Jackson held February 2-19. Kylee capped her 11 years showing goats with her second Dixie National champion winning market goat. Kylee is the daughter of Tracy and Kenny Killebrew of Coxburg. (Photo by Betsy Padgett)



## \*Volunteer (Continued from page 6.)

Submit samples from good and

bad fields for nematode analy-

sis comparisons. These tests

will begin to provide the basis

for making the determination

about what the yield limiting

The methods for dealing with

these problems may be appar-

ent once the issue is uncovered,

but in some cases the solution

may get complicated. When this

point is reached then we can

ease" is we can't treat it.

problem(s) may be.

Natural History, and visit their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill. On May 8, 10 of the State Honorees - five middle level and five high school students - will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2017.

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