



## Zinc Applied to Vineyards by Drip Fertigation is Effective and Feasible.

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Zinc (Zn) applied to vineyards with the drip system (fertigation) is effective and feasible, and either zinc sulfate or Zn EDTA chelate can be used. Fertigation is effective since nutrients are placed where roots are highly concentrated, and uptake is supported by continuous high soil moisture beneath emitters. Zn fertigation rates for mature vines are given in Table 1. These rates are for vines on soil with high potential for fixing Zn; fertilizer Zn becomes unavailable for uptake. Soils with greater than 20% clay (loam, clay loam, clay soil textures) and soils with free lime (pH greater than 8) in the surface soil have a high potential for fixing Zn. Application amounts can be reduced for vines on soil with low fixing potential, sandy, loamy sand, sandy loam, silt loam, and acidic soils. Rates should be lowered to a third or less of the given amounts when fertigating one or two year old vines.

Zinc fertigation should be completed two or three weeks prior to bloom. This allows enough time for vine uptake by bloom. Zinc levels in tissue must be above 25 to 30 ppm from early bloom until veraison in order to avoid deficiency symptoms in fruit.

Leaf petioles can be sampled in mid-April and then vines fertigated according to Zn level in tissue; however, that doesn't leave much time to get sampling, analysis, and fertigation done all before bloom. A more practical approach is to keep a historical record of tissue analysis, two or

more years, which becomes a good guide for deciding fertigation amounts. An interesting note on tissue analysis is that Zn concentration in tissue varies very little during the course of the season, and so April levels will be similar to September unless vines were fertilized. Therefore, sampling in August or September gives a good indication on what to expect the following spring. Leaf petioles opposite cluster are sampled during the bloom period, while recently mature leaf petioles should be used before or after bloom. Zinc toxicity has never been noted in the San Joaquin Valley; however, Zn concentration in leaf petioles should probably not be allowed to exceed 150 ppm.

Mild zinc deficiency is possible when zinc in leaf petioles ranges from 15 to 25 ppm. Symptoms appear in clusters but with no apparent symptoms in foliage. Fruit symptoms include reduced berry set, small berries among normally sized berries, and the presence of shot berries. For table grape growers even mild fruit symptoms can be problematic.

Moderate to severe Zn deficiency is possible when petiole levels are less than 15 ppm. Deficiency symptoms appear in both foliage and fruit. Foliage symptoms include mottled leaves and "little leaf" symptoms, small leaves with an open petiolar sinus. Shoots and laterals may be stunted with closely spaced nodes. Most of the clusters on the vine show symptoms and under

severe zinc deficiency, all clusters are unmarketable for table grapes. Yields are reduced.

**A Case Study:** Zinc fertigation was evaluated on a mature Ribier table grape vineyard located near Exeter. Vines exhibited moderate zinc deficiency symptoms the previous year, and zinc levels in leaf petioles ranged from 10 to 15 ppm. The vineyard soil was Madera loam containing 20% clay and 38% silt with lime both in the surface and sub soil. The soil had high potential for fixing soil-applied zinc because of the clay and lime content. This was an ideal site to evaluate zinc fertigation.

Drip fertigation treatments were applied on April 23<sup>rd</sup> using a low and high rate of zinc sulfate and zinc 6.5% EDTA chelate:

1. Zinc sulfate was applied at rates of 70 or 140 pounds per acre (25 or 50 pounds actual zinc per acre). A 12% zinc sulfate solution was used although zinc sulfate (36%) granular is quite soluble, and could have been used as well.
2. Zinc 6.5% EDTA chelate was applied at either 3.7 or 7.5 gals per acre (2.5 or 5.0 pounds actual zinc per acre).
3. Fertigation treatments were compared to an early bloom foliar application of basic zinc (52%) applied at 5.0 pounds per acre (2.5 pounds actual zinc per acre). The foliar spray was a dilute application using 150 gallons per acre.

The trial included an untreated control and the statistical design was a randomized complete block with eight replications and using four vine plots.

**Fruit and Foliar Symptoms:** Vines were visually graded for zinc deficiency symptoms on August 25<sup>th</sup> - bottom line for the experiment. Table 3 gives a description of the grading scale along with treatment grades.

The control vines had moderate deficiency symptoms that included mottled leaves with some small leaves with flat petiolar sinus "little leaf" symptoms, and nearly half the clusters showed symptoms (small berries, irregular sized berries, and numerous shot berries). Some of these clusters were not marketable, see Photo.

Zinc drip fertigation significantly reduced deficiency symptoms compared to the untreated control. Zinc sulfate and zinc chelate treatments were similar in their effectiveness. The higher application rates had slightly fewer deficiency symptoms than the lower rates. Fruit symptoms were slight, see Photo.

Basic zinc applied to foliage also significantly reduced symptoms of deficiency. Deficiency symptoms were reduced to levels that were similar to drip fertigation using the low application rates.

**Tissue Zinc Levels:** The results of tissue analysis are shown in Table 2. Leaf petioles from opposite flower clusters were taken on April 22 just prior to drip fertigation and indicate vines were indeed very low in zinc. Zinc sulfate increased zinc concentration in petioles that were taken two weeks after fertigation during the early bloom period. Zinc levels in leaf petiole tissue increased 2-fold and 5-fold with the 70-pound per acre and 140-pound per acre application rates of zinc sulfate, respectively. Although Zinc EDTA chelate did not elevate petiole levels by bloom; levels in shoot tips taken a few weeks later were higher. This suggests uptake of Zn using zinc sulfate was more immediate than with the Zn EDTA chelate. By July, all fertigation treatments showed significantly higher levels of Zn in shoot tips compared to the untreated control.

Foliar applied basic zinc elevated shoot tip levels on May 17<sup>th</sup> and the increase was greater than all fertigation treatments. However, the increase was short lived and by July 30<sup>th</sup>, tissue zinc levels dropped down to that of the untreated control.

**Cost:** Zinc sulfate or EDTA Zn chelate applied to a vineyard by drip fertigation is feasible. Zinc sulfate 36% cost about \$.50 per pound and EDTA Zn chelate, 6.5% solution, is about \$12.00 per gallon. Therefore, the material cost for this experiment cost \$35 and \$70 for the low and high rate of zinc sulfate, respectively. Zinc EDTA chelate cost \$44 and \$88 dollars, respectively. The fertigation application cost is negligible.

Foliar application of basic zinc cost about \$5 per acre for the material and \$15 dollars per acre for the application, although it is often piggy backed with the application of other materials. The foliar application is less expensive than fertigation when only one foliar application is necessary. Multiple foliar applications may be necessary when deficiency is severe, and that would make fertigation more competitive.

**Conclusion:** Vine response to a soil application of Zn is greatly improved with the use of drip

irrigation. Drip provides the fertilizer with more continuous wetting to enable Zn movement into the root zone. It can be applied through the drip system or hand-placed directly under each emitter. Optimum rates in trials to date are given in Table 1. Zn sulfate has been more successful than Zn EDTA chelate on a cost-per-acre basis. Early spring, pre-bloom application is preferred. Comparatively high Zn rates are required with drip and the treatment may not last longer than a year. Foliar spray is probably the most economical way to correct most Zn deficiencies unless multiple foliar sprays are required. Economics and assurance of response still favor foliar spray.

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Table 1. Zinc (Zn) fertigation rates for mature vineyards having moderate to severe deficiencies, on fine textured soil, and with low tissue levels of Zn.\*

| <u>Zinc product</u>                | <u>Drip Irrigation</u>                         | <u>Cost per Acre</u> |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Zinc sulfate**<br>(36% granular)   | 50 to 100 lbs/acre<br>(18 to 36 lbs actual Zn) | \$25 to \$50         |
| EDTA Zn chelate<br>(6.5% solution) | 3.0 to 6.0 gal/acre<br>(2 to 4 lbs actual Zn)  | \$36 to \$72         |

\* Lower rates are used on young vines and vines on sandy or acidic soils.

\*\* Zinc sulfate can also be purchased in 10% and 12% solutions that contain 1.1 and 1.4 pounds of Zn per gallon, respectively.

Table 2. Grapevine uptake of zinc applied in April by drip fertigation using zinc sulfate and EDTA chelated zinc.

| Drip Fertigation Treatments  | Zinc in petioles    |                   | Zinc in shoot tips |                  |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|  | 22-April<br>(ppm)   | 6-May<br>(ppm)    | 17-May<br>(ppm)    | 30-July<br>(ppm) |
| Control: No fertilizer applied.  | 15                  | 18                | 38                 | 35               |
| Zinc Sulfate (36%): 70 lbs./acre<br>(25 lbs actual Zn/ac.)             | 14                  | 46                | 39                 | 42               |
| Zinc Sulfate (36%): 140 lbs./ac.<br>(50 lbs actual Zn/ac.)             | 13                  | 100               | 41                 | 40               |
| Zinc Chelate (6.5 % Solution): 3.7 gal./ac.<br>(2.5 lbs actual Zn/ac.) | 10                  | 19                | 38                 | 42               |
| Zinc Chelate (6.5 % Solution): 7.5 gal./ac.<br>(5.0 lbs actual Zn/ac.) | 11                  | 20                | 40                 | 41               |
| Basic Zinc applied foliar (52%): 5 lbs/ac.<br>(2.5 lbs. actual Zn/ac.) | 14                  | (18) <sup>1</sup> | 52                 | 39               |
|  | LSD <sub>05</sub> = |                   | 1.6                | 4.5              |

1. Petioles sampled before basic zinc foliar applied

- Notes: 1. Zinc applied by fertigation on April 23 - two weeks before bloom petiole sampling.  
 2. Vines were at 30%-50% bloom on May 6.  
 3. Foliar basic zinc was applied dilute on May 6.  
 4. Vineyard was Ribier table grapes on Exeter loam soil.

Table 3. Zinc deficiency symptoms visually rated on August 25<sup>th</sup> using a scale from 1 to 5.

| Drip Fertigation Treatment                                      | Vine Grade* |
|---|-------------|
| Control: No fertilizer applied.                                 | 2.8         |
| Zinc Sulfate (36%): 70 lbs/ac or 25 lbs actual Zn;              | 2.0         |
| Zinc Sulfate (36%):140 lbs/ac or 50 lbs actual Zn;              | 1.5         |
| Zinc Chelate (6.5% solution): 3.7 gals/ac or 2.5 lbs actual Zn; | 2.1         |
| Zinc Chelate (6.5% solution): 7.5 gals/ac or 5.0 lbs actual Zn; | 1.7         |
| Foliar Applied (52% basic Zn): 5 lbs/ac or 2.5 lbs actual Zn.   | 1.9         |
| LSD <sub>.05</sub> = 0.5  |             |

•Visual grading used in Table 3:

- 1 = None      No symptoms in foliage or fruit.
- 2 = Slight      No symptoms in foliage; some fruit symptoms on 20% or less of the clusters. Fruit symptoms include reduced berry set, small berries among normally sized berries, and some shot berries.
- 3 = Moderate      Foliage symptoms apparent with mottled leaves and some "little leaf" symptoms, a small leaf with an open petiolar sinus. Fruit symptoms appear on 20% to 60% of clusters. Some cluster not marketable (straggly, variable berry size, and numerous shot berries). Slight yield reduction.
- 4 = Moderate to Severe      Foliage symptoms obvious with mottled leaves and numerous "little leaf" symptoms along with some stunted lateral and main shoots. Fruit symptoms appear on over 60% of cluster and many are not marketable for table grapes. Yields are significantly reduced.
- 5 = Severe      Many shoots are severely stunted, with nodes closely spaced, and most leaves show "little leaf" symptoms; all clusters on vine are unmarketable for table grapes, yields are greatly reduced.

**Ribier Clusters on Vines Fertigated With Zn**



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# Grape Notes

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