



## Technical Update 42

### A guide when sampling soil for microbe analysis

#### Background

Soils are heterogeneous and populations of soil microbes vary with soil depth and type so it is important to realise that a single sample is unlikely to be representative of the whole site. Soil pathogens, in particular, can occur in patches across a field. Whilst separately testing each sample collected is the best method of checking it, the cost is prohibitive so composite samples are created.

To ensure a composite sample is representative it is necessary to collect a number of smaller samples from the area and combine them.

#### Sampling strategy

The frequency and distribution of soil collection for the composite sample is important. The more sub samples the better. If a specific issue is occurring in a restricted area then samples might be collected from that area alone. If the entire site is to be assessed then a sample representative of the entire site should be collated.

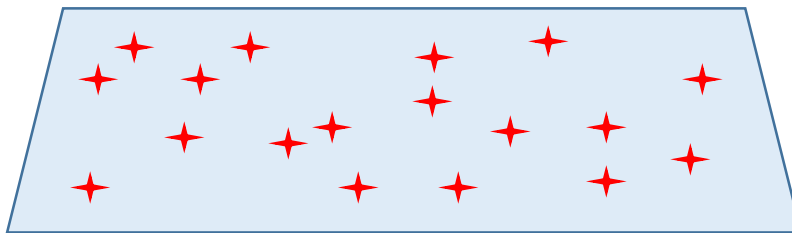
Soil should be taken from the rhizosphere (the root zone), the area within the soil profile that will have the most microbes. This means discarding the top 5 cm of soil, generally sampling to a depth of 25 cm. To ensure representation of the entire site a random or grid sampling strategy should be adopted.

Soil collected should be sealed in a plastic bag and sent to the laboratory. Fresh soil samples should be sent to the lab as soon as possible.

Whether using a sampling auger, trowel or spade it is important to realise that sample contamination can occur if equipment is not cleaned thoroughly between sites. A weak bleach based solution is recommended for cleaning equipment between sites but cleaning equipment thoroughly with water will also avoid contamination.

#### Sampling patterns:

**Random sampling:** Choose random points to sample across the entire field.



**Grid Sampling:** Take samples at regular fixed intervals across the area – typically used where little is known about the field in question.

