Interactive comment on “Soil fertility along toposquences of the East India Plateau and implications for productivity and sustainability” by Peter S. Cornish et al.

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Received and published: 25 March 2020

Thank you for your comment. When soils are as variable as we found here, the challenge is to move away from prescriptive recommendations based on a belief that the soils are infertile, to an approach that attempts to meet the actual requirements of individual fields/crops. In the ideal world, we might use soil tests to tailor a fertiliser mix to each crop type and field, but in Eastern India (and elsewhere in S and SE Asia) this is not practical because reliable and timely soil testing services are unavailable and/or unaffordable, and in any case, the results can be hard to interpret. We believe that, in the right learning environment, farmers can use simple fertiliser test strips or omission trials to effectively explore fertiliser requirements. Whatever approach is taken to extension the message is clear, that most farmers at present achieve yields that are well below the rainfall-determined potential because of nutrient deficiencies, and the cropping systems are unsustainable because of ongoing nutrient depletion.