

# Testing soil for legume fatigue

## Problem

Among legume crops, forage peas and field beans show the most symptoms of legume fatigue. This is due to infestation with *Mycosphaerella*, *Phoma*, *Fusarium*, *Aphanomyces* and other soil-borne pathogens as a result of over-cultivation of peas or other legumes such as lupines, field beans, vetches, red clover or lucerne. A heavy infestation may lead to a total loss of the peas or beans.

## Solution

With the help of a simple legume fatigue test, the soil can be examined for legume-fatigue symptoms prior to cultivation with field peas.

## Benefits

The method offers reference points regarding the soil contamination with the above-mentioned pathogens, and thus indication for a possibly required cultivation break. Refraining from cultivating on contaminated soils helps avoid high yield loss due to legume fatigue.

## Applicability box

### Theme

Nutrient supply, soil quality and soil fertility

### Geographical focus

Generally, and especially in clayey and shallow soils

### Application time

3 months prior to cultivating the field with peas or field beans

### Required time

About 4 hours (baking time not included)

### Period of impact

Entire crop rotation

### Equipment

Baking oven, aluminium trays, flowerpots, seed

### Best in

Crop rotations with a high share of legumes; prior to cultivating peas or beans

## Practical recommendation



1. Extract 10 litres of humid soil from the field plot you wish to examine and sieve it down to a grain size of 10 mm.
2. Moisten dry samples and mix them up evenly.
3. Fill four aluminium trays with the humid soil and store the remaining soil.
4. Cover the trays filled with soil with tinfoil and place them in the baking oven. Sterilise the samples for at least 12 hours at 70-100 °C in the oven.



5. Let the aluminium trays cool for 12 hours after sterilisation.
6. Mark four flowerpots with "R" (for untreated reference) and another four with "H" (for heat-treated soil).
7. Fill the four H-flowerpots with the heat-treated soil and fill the four R-flowerpots with the untreated soil.



8. Place 5 field pea seeds in each pot and cover them with 0.5 cm of soil.
9. Place the pots in a tray with some water and keep them in a sheltered place with at least 18 °C and daylight.
10. Keep the pots humid during about 6 weeks by pouring water into the trays.

## Practical testing

- After about 6 weeks, the test can be evaluated. If the reference plants have germination problems and/or are growing poorly and turning yellow due to heavy infestation, the evaluation can take place earlier.
- For evaluation, cut all plants' shoots down to a height of 2 cm above the soil, and weigh the shoots' fresh weight separately according to procedure. Make a note of the shoots' weight.
- Dividing the weight of the untreated reference plants by the weight of the plants from the heat-treated soil gives a ratio which can be used as an indicator for legume fatigue.
- For example, if the weight of the plants in the untreated soil is 180 g and the weight of the plants with the heat-treated soil is 200 g, then;  $180 \text{ g}/200 \text{ g} =$  a ratio of 0.9.

## Evaluating the results

- If the ratio is above 0.80, we would not expect any yield losses due to biologically-caused legume fatigue.
- If the ratio falls between 0.80 and 0.20, there is a risk of the peas showing symptoms of legume fatigue during or after humid and cool weather. The lower the ratio, the higher the risk of yield losses during unfavourable weather conditions. In such a case, we need to determine, based on the testing results and farm-specific experience, if the risk of cultivating on the sampled land should be taken. Refraining from cultivating forage peas and other legumes for several years would reduce future cultivation risks.
- If the ratio falls under 0.20, we should not grow forage peas or other legumes (including legume-based green manure) on the sampled land in the next 7-8 years, regardless of weather conditions, in order to restore the land.

Use the comment section on the [DiverIMPACTS discussion forum](#) to share your experiences with other farmers, advisors and scientists! If you have any questions concerning the method, please contact the author of the practice abstract by e-mail.



## About this practice abstract and DiverIMPACTS

### Publisher:

Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)  
Ackerstrasse 113, Postfach 219, CH-5070 Frick  
Phone +41 62 865 72 72, [info.suisse@fibl.org](mailto:info.suisse@fibl.org), [www.fibl.org](http://www.fibl.org)

**Authors:** Jacques Fuchs, Klaus-Peter Wilbois, Malgorzata Conder, Tobias Gelencsér and Gilles Weidmann (FiBL)

**Contact:** [jacques.fuchs@fibl.org](mailto:jacques.fuchs@fibl.org)

**Translation:** Andreas Basler

**Language editing:** Simon Moakes

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DiverIMPACTS: The project is running from June 2017 to May 2022. The overall goal of DiverIMPACTS - Diversification through Rotation, Intercropping, Multiple Cropping, Promoted with Actors and value-Chains towards Sustainability - is to achieve the full potential of diversification of cropping systems for improved productivity, delivery of ecosystem services and resource-efficient and sustainable value chains.

**Project website:** [www.diverimpacts.net](http://www.diverimpacts.net)

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