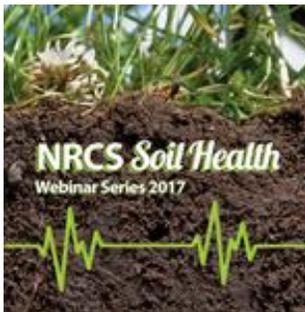




NRCS Soil Health Update March, 2017

Sharing soil health marketing communications information and resources from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, other partners and the media.



NRCS Soil Health webinar series

Soil health economics: A farmer's perspective – March 14, 2017 at 2 p.m. EASTERN Time

In this upcoming webinar, Rodney Roulon will present both economic and soil health data from his on-farm studies as he has implemented his system. He will discuss how increasing soil organic matter by over 1.5 percent has resulted in a yield increase of 12.8 bushels of corn per acre. In addition, Rodney will show that the net economic benefit derived from soil health is more than \$69 per acre. [Click here](#) to learn more about the webinar and to sign in.

Note: No advance registration is required and space is not limited, but participants should sign in 15 minutes early. This webinar offers CEUs and will be recorded for future viewing. It is presented by the [USDA NRCS Soil Health Division](#). Contact [Holli Kuykendall, Ph.D.](#), National Technology Specialist, for more information.



Related from Wallaces Farmer – This farmer made cover crops a dollar-and-cents decision

Rodney Rulon estimates that his family spent \$91,000 to seed cover crops on their farm. But he also estimates the increased profitability from incorporating cover crops into their system at \$376,000. That's a net profit of \$285,000. It's \$80 more profit per acre for cover crops, and a return on investment of 311%. [Read more.](#)



Agri-News – Got you cover cropped

Cover crops may be a hot, new topic making the farm meeting circles these days, but for four southern Illinois farmers, they are long-standing practices with noticeable payoffs. "This is all about the long-term value," said Paul Trainor, a Union County row-crop farmer near Dongola. "You cannot look at cover crops based on one year for increased production. That's not how they work. You have to look at them as a long-term thing." [Read more.](#)



No-Till Farmer – Peer groups, cover crops and livestock equals learning plus growth

For the past 3 years, a group of eight Nebraskans have gathered around each other's kitchen tables to discuss soil health. The peer group is comprised of producers ranging from central to southeastern Nebraska. By periodically involving the NRCS, No-till on the Plains Winter Conference, sponsoring field days and other resources, they seek to learn and share. Mike McDonald, Palmyra, Neb. says the group brings a different focus each time it meets on how to help each other. [Read more.](#)

Watch the [NRCS interview](#) with Mike McDonald. (3:36)



UW-Green Bay and Purdue to work on first large-scale study linking soil health with Great Lakes water quality

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay will take the lead on a \$508,000 grant for one of the first large-scale attempts to directly link in-field soil health parameters with intensive edge-of-field water quality monitoring across the Great Lakes Basin. The results of this work will provide direct management recommendations for improving the health and quality of the Great Lakes. [Read more.](#)



USDA-NRCS Blog – 5 signs you might be the perfect 'soil mate'

The hope in healthy soil is taking root across America. Farmers, ranchers, researchers, conservationists, non-profit organizations, foodies and others are all working to help regenerate our working lands by improving the health of function of our nation's soil. So inspired by what they're learning about the hope in healthy soil, there's a whole new generation of "soil mates" working to unlock the secrets in the soil. Here are five signs you might be one of them... [Read more.](#)



Wallaces Farmer – 'Talking to Your Tenant' new Iowa Learning Farms series

Caring for Iowa's farmland requires many decisions to be made that impact the future generation's ability to best use the land for agricultural production. To help begin the conversation between landlord and tenant, Iowa Learning Farms has created a new publication series with talking points and relevant research findings about a variety of conservation practices. [Read more.](#)



AgPro – Retailers' role with cover crops

Cover crops play a valuable role as one of several best practices in the Sustain program. "It's one of many tools in our toolbox," says Matt Carstens, senior vice president with Land O'Lakes. "We want to link farmers with practices, products and technologies that will help them. I would say the No. 1 question they ask is how can cover crops be economical for them..." A free Cover Crop Economic Decision [Support Tool](#) from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps determine the immediate costs and benefits of cover crops. [Read more.](#)

Progressive Farmer – Underground Movement

The mid-February edition of *Progressive Farmer* titled "Underground movement" features a wide range of soil health-related articles and associated videos. In "More than a philosophy," Gregg Hillyer writes: Spend a few minutes with Mark Mueller, and you quickly discover he's a student of history... But when Mueller returned to the family farm in 1995 after a stint in agribusiness, the harsh lessons of past civilizations trying to feed themselves shaped his farming philosophy. [Read more.](#)

The Plattsmouth Journal – USDA initiative funds statewide demonstration farms

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is leading a state-wide effort to enhance the adoption of soil health management systems through the Soil Health Demonstration Farms Initiative. The 2017 initiative sign up will continue to establish demonstration farms across the state to showcase soil health practices and related cropping system comparisons. Landowners interested in applying for funding to establish a soil health demonstration farm should submit their application to NRCS by March 17, 2017. [Read more.](#)

Successful Farming – Rebuilding a farm

Despite the repetitive crop failures and dying earth, [Rocky] Bateman believed there was a way to breathe life into the soil and crops... Soon after, he participated in a tour of no-till farms in western North Dakota... Inspired, Bateman tracked down no-till mentors and learned all he could about how to practice no-till in ways that would rebuild the biological life in the soil. Bateman hasn't looked back since. [Read more.](#)



USDA-NRCS – New radio public service ads now available

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service recently released two new radio public service ads that promote the basics and benefits of soil health. The new 60-second spot features another episode of the fictitious "One Soil to Live" radio soap opera, while the 30-second spot asks "If Your Soil Could Talk, What Would it Say?" [Listen](#) to the spots.

[Hear all 13](#) of NRCS' soil health radio spots from its "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil" campaign on its radio PSA archive page.



Phys.Org – Study investigates impact of strip tillage on a high-value crop

A study done by researchers at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde may help producers in the Texas Winter Garden region and other areas decide whether conservation tillage methods might benefit them in the production of high-value crops. "Across the three years, the greatest difference in marketable yields between the strip and conventional tillage systems was in the fruit size from 5 to 8 kilograms or about 11 to 18 pounds, which was 50 percent of the total yield. [Read more.](#)



Wallaces Farmer – The Leopold Center at ISU announces the winners of Iowa's prestigious sustainable agriculture award

A farming couple who advocates for sustainable agriculture and a USDA agronomist are the recipients of the 2016 Spencer Award for Sustainable Agriculture. David and Corrine Williams of Villisca and Tom Kaspar of Ames will accept this prestigious award on March 22 at the upcoming 2017 Iowa Water Conference in Ames. The award recognizes researchers, teachers and farmers who have contributed significantly to the environmental and economic stability of the Iowa farming community. [Read more.](#)



Agri-News – Graze cover crops for '\$200 bump'

Southern Illinois University beef specialist Rebecca Atkinson says there are too many good reasons to move herds to grazing on cover crops. Certainly, there's erosion control, improved weed and insect control, increased soil moisture and better soil health overall, but the impact of cattle grazing on cover crops also can translate into healthier herds and cost savings. [Read more.](#)

Related: [Watch](#) the NRCS interview with Donnie Dippel regarding cover crops and grazing on his Texas ranch.



No-Till Farmer – Photos: Cover crops from the Corn Belt and beyond

From Texas to North Dakota, to Ontario and Kentucky, here are how some no-tillers from across the Corn Belt and into the Great Plains are using cover crops on their farms and the benefits they're witnessing. [View](#) the photos and captions. **Related from No-Till Farmer** – Organic Matter: The lifeline of soil. [Read more.](#)



Belgrade News – Helena farm family uncovers importance of soil health

It was 2012, and the Dusenberry family was frustrated. Across their 600-acre farm and livestock operation in the Helena Valley, years of sound stewardship and management practices didn't seem to be making any real difference. "We were disappointed in the output of our land," says Tim Dusenberry. "We were using more and more fertilizer, the cost was up to 75 to 80 dollars an acre, and the returns were still low. [Read more.](#)



Nebraska Farmer – 14 species of cover crops — and counting!

What Mike Werling does when he combines more than a dozen species of cover crops into one seeding mixture isn't new. Werling, of Decatur, Ind., is one of several veteran no-tillers who add various cover crop species to speed up the return of healthy soil, especially on challenging fields. [Read more.](#)



Manitoba Cooperator (CA) – Season too short for cover crops? Maybe not

The benefits [of cover crops] go beyond soil conservation alone — recent survey reports that U.S. corn yields rose an average of 8.3 bushels per acre, and soybeans 2.4 bushels per acre, in fields after four years of cover cropping. That may be fine for the U.S. Corn Belt where there's more time to get the cover crop established and growing, but does it make sense for short-season Western Canada? [Read more.](#)



Capital Press – Dairy farmers tackle water quality challenges

Using an innovative online tool to schedule late winter and early spring manure applications, Terry and Troy Lenssen of Lenssen Dairy in Lynden, Wash., can give soil microbes a chance to convert slurry nutrients into plant-available forms before spring growth starts in earnest, while also protecting local waterways from runoff of nutrients and bacteria.. [Read more.](#)

Alberta Farmer (CA) – COVER CROPS: The potential is huge, but so is the learning curve

Looking over at the emptied room that had been packed with attentive farmers a few minutes earlier, cover crops guru Kevin Elmy could only shake his head. “If I had given a talk here five years ago, maybe the front row might have been filled — maybe,” the Saskatchewan farmer said after his FarmTech presentation, which had drawn a standing-room-only crowd of 200 or so farmers. “We’re at a very early stage of it, but the snowball is getting big. It’s growing quite quickly. And it’s not just one sector — it’s grain guys, it’s livestock, it’s mixed farms, it’s organic, it’s conventional, people in dry areas, people in wet areas. It’s everyone.” [Read more.](#)

Additional soil health marketing communications materials from the soil health communications team are in development, so stay tuned for further updates. Thanks for all you do on behalf of conservation and American agriculture.

**The views and opinions expressed in the aforementioned articles or videos are those of the individuals featured therein and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of any agency of the U.S. Government.*