



NRCS Soil Health Update *August, 2017*

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



Voice of America – Farmers find healthy soils yield healthy profits

Trey Hill of Maryland has not tilled his soybean field in years. The young crop peeks out from below waist-high brown stalks of what remains of last year's cover crop, a mix of grains, legumes, radishes and more. A short drive away, in a neighbor's conventionally tilled field, soybeans grow in neat and tidy lines on a clean slate of bare earth. University of Maryland soil scientist Ray Weil sees signs of trouble. The lower leaves of the soybean plants are splashed with mud from a rainstorm two nights earlier. [Read more.](#)



USDA-NRCS – 'Unlock the Secrets' TV, web PSAs receive top video awards

Adding to its list of recent industry accolades, NRCS' "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil" campaign has received top honors in the 2017 Videographer Awards competition. Landing Awards of Excellence in the categories of Web Videos, Writing, and Public Service Announcements/Commercials, the winning PSAs feature astronomer Dr. Laura Danly and were produced in-house. The Award of Excellence is presented to projects the judges deemed were written, produced, shot and edited in an exceptional manner. Learn more at the Videographer Awards [website](#).

The Des Moines Register

Des Moines Register – Editorial: To clean up our water, go 'nuts' like this Iowa farmer

"My job as farmer is not to produce; my job is to care for the land. And when I do this properly, this provides for all of us," [Seth] Watkins, 48, told an audience this month at the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation's Capitol Hill Ocean Week in Washington, D.C. Why is an Iowa farmer talking to marine scientists about his farming practices? [Read more.](#)



Corn & Soybean Digest – Healthy soil absorbs huge rains, halts erosion

Kurt Lawton writes: Kudos to the central Illinois family farm of Kirk and Tiona Kimble for capturing cool images of a four-inch rain event in late April – showing the differences between a field of cover crops and a conventional-tilled field. Their comment when they sent me the photos: “We believe it’s a pretty good testament to the benefits of covers for erosion control! And it seems like we continue to face these huge rain events every spring, so we’re happy we adopted covers to build our soils and keep it in the fields.” [Read more.](#)



No-Till Farmer – Getting no-till into the classroom

John Dobberstein writes: It’s a modest start, but it looks like there’s a push under way to get the message about the benefits of no-till practices and soil health into high school and college classrooms. Scott Jones of MidWest Grass & Forage in Macomb, Ill., says presentations given this year by NRCS before college and high school ag educators in Illinois included the well-known no-till slake and rainfall simulation demonstrations and soil permeability test, and a brief overview of the NRCS’ emphasis on soil health improvement. [Read more.](#) Also from ***No-Till Farmer – Lean, ‘green’ no-tilling machine.*** [Read more.](#)



Progressive Grocer – Whole Kids Foundation launches education app, starting with soil

The Whole Kids Foundation, a foundation of Austin, Texas-based natural grocer Whole Foods Market, has launched a free organic education mobile app, offering a “fun way for kids and parents to learn what it looks and feels like to grow food in harmony with nature.” “We wanted to create a playful way to help kids understand the importance of healthy soil and see firsthand the roles that plants, animals and people play in keeping it balanced,” said Nona Evans, president and executive director of Whole Kids Foundation. [Read more.](#)



Lancaster Farming – Soil health within reach for potato growers

Disturbing the soil is a no-no when building soil health, but it’s basically impossible to grow potatoes without moving dirt. Farmers may need to take a step backward when they grow a high-disturbance crop, but they can take two steps forward in the other years of their rotation, said Marlon Winger, a soil health specialist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the Mountain West. Winger spoke during a July 11 webinar. [Read more.](#) View the [webinar](#) on demand.



USDA-NRCS video – Cover crops on dryland wheat?

Challenge accepted.

Despite the common assumption that you can't make cover crops work on dryland wheat in Eastern Oregon, Wasco County wheat grower Noah Williams is determined to find a solution. By working with his local Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Wasco Soil and Water Conservation District, Williams is using cover crops to reduce erosion, retain soil moisture, and build more organic matter in the soil--and even better, he's tracking the data using soil sensors. Watch [the video](#). (4:45)

Corn & Soybean Digest – Big challenges to cut nitrate loading

Lynn Betts writes: Agren founder and CEO Tom Buman knows that even if all farmers did all the right things to manage nitrogen for optimal use in a corn-soybean rotation—the 4Rs: right source, right rate, right time, and right place—scientists project that we may reduce nitrogen loading by 6% to 15%. Unfortunately, that reduction doesn't come close to the 45% reduction in nitrogen loading expected from states in the upper Midwest. [Read more](#).

USDA-NRCS – Roller crimper key in organic no-till system

Keota farmer Levi Lyle never thought he would be a go-to person for eastern Iowa farmers to rent a roller crimper. But with his interest in eliminating the use of herbicides on portions of his family's cropland, he now has two crimpers that he uses and rents to farmers from Waterloo to Bloomfield. Lyle is transitioning about 66 of their 750 cropland acres to organic production. He and his father, Trent, began crop-sharing a few years ago. Without the use of chemical herbicides, Lyle began using cover crops in recent years to help suppress weeds, instead of disturbing the soil with a field cultivator. [Read more](#).

Southern Illinois University – SIU researchers appear in special feature issue of 'Journal of Ecology'

Plant biologist David Gibson wants to be part of the solution. The problem he has his eye on is the probability of an impending global food security crisis. Gibson, professor of plant biology and a distinguished scholar at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, is the executive editor of the British Ecological Society's "Journal of Ecology." However, for a special feature in the journal released last week, he and co-editor Richard Bardgett, from the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Manchester in England, honed in on agriculture... [Read more](#).



NRCS Soil Health webinar series

Managing cover crops in an arid region: A farmer's perspective – Aug 8, 2017 2:00 pm US/Eastern

Presented by Jimmy Emmons, Oklahoma Soil Health Innovator and Producer, this webinar will focus on managing cover crops to improve soil health in a fragile, arid region of western Oklahoma by integrating livestock and multi-species covers into a diverse no-till cropping and grazing system to increase water and nutrient cycling. [Learn more.](#) **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.

AMERICAN
Agriculturist.

American Agriculturist – 5 ways to make one day worth a week's cover crop growth

Steve Groff writes: "Every day counts" is usually associated with spring planting season. Perfect weather seldom occurs. When it's time to plant, you need to be ready to roll! The same is true for fall cover crop planting, too. I frequently emphasize: "Treat your cover crops like your cash crops." To do this, think and plan strategically. Follow your cash crop harvester with your drill or planter as closely as possible — even if you're chopping corn silage in August! [Read more.](#)

WallacesFarmer.

Wallaces Farmer – Choosing a seeding method for cover crops

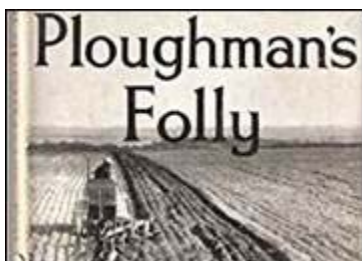
The more we learn about cover crops through research and farmers' own experimentation, the bolder managers are getting with letting the cover crop grow right up until or even past planting the main crop. This system is particularly helpful in soybeans where a cereal rye cover crop can suppress weeds well enough to reduce or eliminate herbicide passes, and has no negative impact on soybean yields. But all of that biomass required to suppress weeds had an unexpected consequence for some farmers: The aerial seeding for next year's cover crop failed. [Read more.](#)



High Plains Journal – Grazing to improve soil health, producer profits

Richard Teague might be considered a cowboy of a different kind. He's not rounding up stray cattle, but rather wrangling the best management practices on ranches to help the cattle and their owners. Teague, a Texas A&M AgriLife Research ecologist at Vernon, grew up on a farm and knows firsthand there are some unintended consequences from traditional long-standing agricultural practices that might not readily be seen. "I'm an ecologist and know that for an adequately functioning ecosystem, you have to have good soil function," Teague said. [Read more.](#)

Missouri Farmer Today



Missouri Farmer Today – Missouri part of cover crop soil health project

University of Missouri plant sciences professor Rob Myers has studied the variety of benefits cover crops can have for farmers. A new research project will allow for further study into their impact on soil health. The university will be working to develop cover crop varieties specifically designed to improve soil health and also meet other producer goals. [Read more.](#)

Merit or Myth – Erosion: One of the greatest issues facing American soils

There are many issues facing the modern-day farmer, though most of them are nothing that new. After all, nature has always kept us on our toes in the form of drought, flood, and other extreme events. You would think that with technological advances and increased agricultural acumen, however, we would have taken steps towards reducing the negative effects of nature.... or at least be part of the solution, not the problem. Unfortunately, when it comes to erosion, it would appear that we ourselves are the ones to blame for digging us into a deeper ditch. [Read more.](#)

Mother Earth News – Protecting healthy farm soil

Healthy soil is the foundation for a flourishing planet that's capable of sequestering carbon and recycling nutrients. An increasing number of farmers are also experiencing the bottom-line benefits of proper biological soil management. Not only does healthy soil ensure bigger, better crops; it also keeps money in farmers' pockets and strengthens rural economies. Thanks to the work of the [NRCS's Soil Health Campaign](#), farm fields throughout America are starting to look a little greener. [Read more.](#)

The Weekly Times (AU) – Victorian No-Till Conference: The great carbon heist

Australian farmers learning from the experiences of their counterparts in the US could change the face of agriculture in this country. That was the message from soil ecologist Christine Jones, at the Victorian No-Till Farmers Association annual conference in Echuca this month, when she spoke on the topic of farming "light". [Read more.](#)

No-Till Farmer – 1943: Ed Faulkner calls out plowing

Seventy-four years ago, on July 5, 1943, Edward Faulkner first stated "no one has ever advanced a scientific reason for plowing" when his book, *Plowman's Folly* was first published. *Time Magazine* said the book was "one of the most revolutionary ideas in agricultural history," and *The Associated Press* quipped, "His crops are the wonder of his neighbors and the despair of the conventional farmer." [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.*

