



## NRCS Soil Health Update

May, 2017

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



### **NRCS, Wrangler, FFA team up to cultivate next generation of soil health farmers**

Chariti Brewer's inspiration to teach America's future farmers is rooted in the words she found in a college catalog some 20 years ago: "If you want to change the world," read one of the course descriptions, "change the way you feed it." So even though it meant rolling out of bed at 5:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, Brewer wasn't going to miss an opportunity to refresh her love of the soil – to learn more about how healthy soil can change the world *and* the way we feed and clothe it. [Read more.](#)



**NC State University – Project aims for new and better cover crops**  
Scientists from NC State University are joining with others across the country to promote soil health by developing and helping farmers adopt new cover crops. Made possible by a \$2.2 million grant from Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, the new \$6.6 million research initiative aims "to get new cover crop solutions into the hands of those who use them or will be using them," according to Twain Butler, a research agronomist with the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation who is leading the project. [Read more.](#)



### **Fresh Produce Journal – Scope for new 'sustainable food line' at retailers**

A new line for sustainable food that encourages retailers to compete on sustainability rather than just price could create a new driver for the agricultural system, agri-food data provider Agrimetrics has predicted. Dave Lawrence, the newly-appointed chair of the company believes consumers would welcome a sustainable food line in supermarkets. It would also offer a third way between conventional and organic farming, he thinks. [Read more.](#)



#### **NRCS Soil Health webinar series**

##### **Pest management from an ecological framework (May 9, 2017, 2 p.m. EASTERN Time)**

Presented by Penn State's John Tooker, Ph.D., this webinar will focus on ecological management of agricultural pests (insects and slugs); and, it will emphasize the importance of pairing soil health practices with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to ensure that gains in soil health are not degraded by unnecessary pesticide use. [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 [Hollie Kuykendall, Ph.D.](#), National Technology Specialist, for more information.



#### **UC Food Observer – ‘Clean floors’ give way to cover crops**

Chris Sayer writes: for farmers of a certain generation, cover crops represented a big change in thinking. My Dad was part of that “clean floor” generation, so I was really surprised that he was among the first in our area to plant a cover crop on the orchard floor. I expected that we’d get a reaction, and we did. Curiosity. Other farmers wanted to know what we were up to. [Read more](#).

#### **University of Tennessee – Weed control with your cover crop**

With planting just around the corner, there are a few management considerations of cover crops that are being used for weed control. There is no single best way to manage all cover crops prior to any given cash crop. Tailoring the cover crop to best fit your cash crop can make a difference in the ultimate success of your weed control program. [Read more](#).

#### **NRCS Earth Team volunteer gives voice to living and life-giving resource**

As someone who has spent her adult life studying the great mysteries of our universe, it may come as a surprise that astronomer Dr. Laura Danly is also captivated by the mysteries of something much closer to home – our living and [life-giving soil](#). But dig a little deeper, and you’ll find her connection with the soil is closer than you might think. [Read more](#).



#### **No-Till Farmer – Simple steps to assess the health of no-till soils**

Many farmers have switched to no-till and are seeding cover crops to improve soil quality and farm more sustainably. But when it comes to truly assessing the health of fields, there is no quick way to do it — and I don’t always feel farmers spend enough time examining this. Nothing takes the place of doing an assessment in the field and getting your hands dirty. There’s a lot you can learn by just walking, digging and feeling. [Read more](#).



#### **Phys.Org – Scientists show how species diversity can pay dividends**

A collaboration of scientists has developed one of the first models to assign a dollar value to the loss or gain of species in an ecosystem. The new work, published in *Science Advances*, offers an economic argument for preserving biodiversity. [The study] analyzed data from two long-term experiments in the Minnesota grasslands that measured how plant and soil carbon changed with the number of plant species in a plot. [Read more](#). Also from *Phys.Org*: Cattle associated antibiotics disturb soil ecosystems. [Read more](#).



#### **Ensia – How a new way of thinking about soil health sparked a national movement in agriculture**

[Ray Archuleta's] message is powerful, and producers drive home knowing that soil is alive, that it can be sick or healthy, and that healthy soil can do some pretty amazing things — like make a farm more resilient to drought, sequester enormous amounts of carbon, reduce erosion and support an ecosystem that's teeming with life. [Read more](#).



#### **Grist – A crucial climate mystery is just under our feet**

What Jonathan Sanderman really wanted was some old dirt. He called everyone he could think of who might know where he could get some. He emailed colleagues and read through old studies looking for clues, but he kept coming up empty. Sanderman was looking for old dirt because it would let him test a plan to save the world. [Read more](#).



#### **AgriNews – Look out for herbicide carryover in cover crop operations**

The usefulness of cover crops is becoming more and more widely known. As the popularity of the practice spreads, it's important to keep in mind how using cover crops fits into the other intricacies of your farming operation. That includes herbicide use — especially if you use the cover crops for grazing. Dan Smith, an Extension agent for the University of Wisconsin, spoke at the March 16 Southeast Minnesota Cover Crop Consortium about legal restrictions on herbicide with cover crops. The most consistent point he brought up? Read the labels. [Read more](#).



#### **Tri-State Livestock News – Farmers, ranchers taking after bison when it comes to keeping soil healthy**

The bison may be long gone from the prairies, but their grazing habits are being replicated on ranches across the Great Plains. When millions of bison moved from place to place, their grazing habits forced plant life on the prairies to grow and thrive. And now that the buffalo are gone, ranchers and farmers are copying their habits. [Read more](#).



# Grainews

## NO-TILL FARMER

The No-Till Authority Since 1972

### **Phys.Org – Cover, crimp, cultivate? Organic cover crop methods examined for weed control**

Can organic growers fight weeds and increase soil health? Researchers know cover crops provide part of the answer. Cover crops anchor the soil with their roots. Some even add nutrients to the soil. That would take care of the soil health concern. But the question of weeds remains... Over a two-year experiment, the researchers confirmed two principles: there's no silver bullet for producing the perfect crop and unexpected weather always gets in the way. [Read more.](#)

### **Grain News (CA) – Are you a (soil) health nut?**

Sean McGrath writes: Building organic matter and taking care of our soil resource has positive results for our farms and ranches, even if we make a few mistakes along the way. Soil can be a highly forgiving ecosystem, and soil microflora have incredible reproductive powers. As managers, this means that there is some resiliency and coverage in the system for all those times we screw up. It also means that impoverished soils can be renewed and regenerated at a rate that is surprisingly fast. [Read more.](#)

### **No-Till Farmer – Using cover crop benefits as a primer for cold cash**

Chris Teachout compares his cover crop philosophy to taking a new gun out on a bear hunt: No hunter uses a new gun on the big hunt without practicing with it first to work out all the kinks. In the same fashion, Teachout says growers should experiment with cover crops on their own operations, continuously adjusting for increased returns and improved soil health. "That is how I learn," he says. "Then I can tweak as I go along." [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.*

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