



NRCS Soil Health Update June, 2017

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



Video – Inspiring the next generation of soil health professionals
This fast-paced, two-minute video encapsulates the recent “Next Generation Land Stewardship Workshop,” presented recently by Wrangler, The Future Farmers of America and USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service in Greensboro, NC. The goal of the event: To inspire and inform the next generation of soil health farmers, researchers and agricultural professionals. Watch the [video](#). (2:00)



Eagle Tribune – Take care of the dirt, the soil takes care of you
John M. Crisp writes: Scientists and philosophers occasionally contemplate the tiny tolerances that make life on earth possible. Sometimes they refer to our globe's orbit as the "Goldilocks Zone." If our humble sphere flew just a little closer to the sun, or just a little farther away, water in a liquid state would be impossible and so would, probably, life... But if we're not sufficiently awed, as yet, let's cut the margin of life a little closer... [Read more](#).



Selfies for soil health!
Do you “dig” healthy soil like we do? Would you like to tell others? Print out our new, fun graphic, cut along the dotted line and tape it to a stick (optional) – then take a selfie with the graphic and share via Instagram or Twitter #soilhealth. Be sure to tell us what you "Dig about healthy soil" in your Tweet and please tag @USDA_NRCS in the photo. Click [here](#) to download the graphic.



Seattle Times – UW professor digs in to our problem of soil degradation in ‘Growing a Revolution’
“Are you ready for an optimistic book about the environment?” asks University of Washington geomorphology professor David R. Montgomery at the beginning of his fifth book. He claims that although soil degradation is “the least recognized of the pressing crises humanity faces, it is also one of the most solvable.” Put simply, a few crucial changes in agricultural practices — whether in kitchen gardens, small farms or huge agribusinesses — would rebuild our damaged soil. [Read more](#).



Civil Eats – Scientists now say incentivizing soil health would improve food security and sustainability

In a [new paper](#), Cornell University assistant professor of agricultural business and finance Joshua Woodard and post-doctoral research assistant Leslie Verteramo Chiu argue that tying the Crop Insurance Program to the health of a farm's soil could make it a powerful tool for promoting more sustainable and resilient farming. [Read more.](#)



NRCS Soil Health webinar series

Improving soil health on urban farms – June 13, 2017, 2 p.m. EASTERN Time

Presented by Minor Morgan of North Valley Organics in Albuquerque, NM, this webinar will illustrate how the principles of a Soil Health Management System are implemented on a 3.5 acre urban farm growing mixed vegetables, and it will emphasize practices that enhance the microbial life in the soil. [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.



AgWired – Soil Health Institute announces action plan

The Soil Health Institute (SHI) today unveiled the “Enriching Soil, Enhancing Life” [Soil Health Action Plan](#) during a National Press Club event. “This is an exciting time to be working in soil health,” said SHI president and CEO Wayne Honeycutt. “The action plan identifies critical goals and priorities. It helps identify key gaps in our knowledge and implementation...and we’ve identified specific actionable steps to achieve these things.” [Read more.](#)



Successful Farming – Erosion: Treat the problem, not the symptoms

Beauty and the beast. A tale as old as time. This story has nothing to do with love. It's all about erosion and what can be done to transform overworked, abused soil into healthy, productive soil teeming with life. The situation is grim across the Midwest. Soil is eroding around a rate of 5 tons per acre per year, with severe cases losing closer to 100 tons per acre, says Jerry Hatfield, director of the USDA-ARS National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment. [Read more.](#) Also from *Successful Farming* – **North Dakota farmer Joe Breker's lifetime of conservation discovery.** [Read more.](#)



Penn State News – Penn State to launch undergraduate ag stewardship and conservation certificate

A new undergraduate certificate program offered by Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences will give students interested in agricultural stewardship an opportunity for classroom and hands-on learning in the sustainability of agricultural soil and water resources. The Agricultural Stewardship and Conservation Certificate program, designed with input from the Natural

Resources Conservation Service, also will help train the next generation of conservation professionals... [Read more.](#)



Kiss the Ground – ‘The Compost Story’

In a follow-up project to the enormously successful short film, *The Soil Story*, *The Compost Story* combines celebrity star power with down-to-earth information about the importance and necessity of composting to save our small, blue planet. Beautifully designed to easily translate the real science about microbes, soil, and the carbon cycle, *The Compost Story* is an entertaining film that delivers an upbeat message about the many benefits of composting. [Watch the film.](#) (6:35)



USDA-NRCS – Playlist of Soil Health Short Course Workshop videos now available

Texas NRCS and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board presented the first Texas Soil Health Short Course in Wichita Falls February 22-23, 2017. Speakers ranged from farmers, ranchers, researchers, professors to NRCS field staff, all of whom were videotaped for this video playlist. Each presentation runs approximately 45 minutes. [View the playlist.](#)



Morning Ag Clips – Tillage practices damage earthworms

The digging, stirring and overturning of soil by conventional ploughing in tillage farming is severely damaging earthworm populations around the world, say scientists. The findings published in the scientific journal *Global Change Biology* show a systematic decline in earthworm populations in soils that are ploughed every year. The deeper the soil is disturbed the more harmful it is for the earthworms. [Read more.](#)



Ag Web – How sustainability helps farm businesses grow

Nate Birt writes: If you think sustainability is a term clever food companies use to sell products to shoppers at a higher mark-up, you need to do some homework... Already, major retailers such as Wal-Mart are drawing a line in the sand on sustainability, setting the stage for opportunities for young farmers. In mid-April, the Bentonville, Ark.-based retailer announced *Project Gigaton*, an initiative that seeks to cut carbon emissions by 1 gigaton—equal to 1 billion tons—across its value chain by 2030. [Read more.](#)



USDA-NRCS – Conservation’s calling

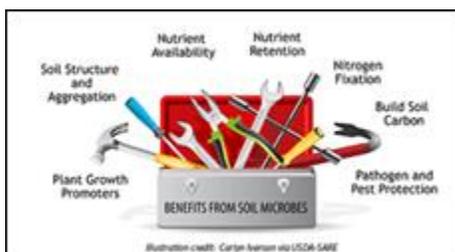
NRCS’ Spencer Miller writes: The Curt Trost Farm has both a tradition and a future—and looks with pride and confidence in both directions. Turning setbacks into opportunities, Curt Trost found a deep connection to the land and embraced conservation... “When we started out, in 1982, everyone plowed their corn crops,” said Curt. “The erosion shocked me. Other people seemed okay with it,

but I couldn't stand by watching the topsoil blow away." [Read more.](#)



No-Till Farmer – Don't let profitability blow away

You'd be surprised how much topsoil is lost through wind erosion, and even more surprised to learn how long it takes to rebuild it. Texas A&M is looking at how no-till and covers can help manage this problem. [Read more.](#)



USDA-SARE – On-line library of cover crop and soil health images available

SARE's Library of Cover Crop and Soil Health Images is now available to help educators show producers how cover crops can work on their farms. The collection includes over 1,500 photos and illustrations organized into 10 galleries. A [soil health gallery](#) features high-resolution illustrations compiled in a set of 20 PowerPoint slides for use in presentations. [Visit SARE's library](#) of cover crop and soil health images.



My Eastern Shore – Maryland farmers break cover crop record

Maryland farmers planted a record-setting nearly 560,000 acres of cover crops on their fields last fall as part of the Maryland Department of Agriculture's 2016-2017 Cover Crop Program, breaking the previous record of 501,204 acres planted last year, according to a news release. "Over the last several years, our cover crop program has really taken off as more and more farmers reap the agronomic and environmental benefits of including these hardworking crops in their planting rotations," said Agriculture Secretary Joe Bartenfelder in a statement. [Read more.](#)



American Agriculturist – What? Cover crops plug tile lines?

Based on an extremely few tile-plugging incidents involving deep-rooted cover crops on hundreds of thousands of tilled acres, risks are negligible. Yet, this issue seems to pop up every year somewhere. Plugged tile lines aren't a new phenomenon, and can't be blamed exclusively on cover crops. But yes, it's plausible that deep-rooted cover crops such as radishes and annual ryegrass grow that deep. [Read more.](#) Also from **American Agriculturist – Cost-shared air seeding of cover crops flying high.** [Read more.](#)



Western Farm Press – Gemperle Farms sees multiple benefits of cover crops in almonds

Christine Gemperle doesn't like bare orchard floors in her almonds. "I'm a big proponent of having green stuff growing in my orchards," she says. While appearance may be a factor, it's not the only one she cites for wanting cover crops in her orchards. Gemperle and her

brother, Erich, use cover crops early in the season to give arriving bee colonies a jump start from their overwintering status and to help promote soil health throughout the season. [Read more.](#)



High Plains Journal – Soil scientist: Leave the tilling to Mother Nature

Whether talking to farmers in France, Ghana or southern Ohio, Rafiq Islam’s message is consistent: Tilling the land does more long-term damage than good. As an Ohio State University soil scientist, Islam is among the disciples in the movement to convince farmers that plowing their fields before they plant or after they harvest harms the health of the soil and its ability to spur growth and resist erosion. [Read more.](#)



Corn & Soybean Digest – Think June cover crop interseeding

As more farmers realize the numerous cover crop benefits for building soil organic matter, cutting erosion and helping keep nutrients in the field, their next goal becomes achieving a good stand without impeding harvest – while abiding by crop insurance rules. The good news is that crop insurance rules are in place to allow the early interseeding of cover crops. [Read more.](#)



Phys.Org – Saving costs with cover crops

ARS agricultural engineer Ted Kornecki wanted to see if farmers could save on labor and fuel costs by making just one pass of a tractor equipped with a roller, a seed planter, and an herbicide sprayer. "It may be a strategy worth considering, now or in the future, given rising fuel and labor costs," says Kornecki, with the ARS National Soil Dynamics Laboratory in Auburn, Alabama. [Read more.](#)



Indiana Prairie Farmer – Can brassica cover crops help control fungus issues?

Are you concerned about using fungicides? Don Donovan says some Indiana farmers using brassicas in cover crop mixes find that they may help reduce the need for fungicides in some cases. Donovan is a district conservationist in west-central Indiana. The information on this possible tie between brassicas and cover crops, as well as two other issues addressed below, was prepared by the Indiana Conservation Partnership. [Read more.](#)



Dublin City University (Ireland) – Soil, bees and whiskies: Better understanding through chemistry

This week's Spotlight on Research is with Dr. Blánaid White Lecturer, School of Chemical Sciences and Principal Investigator, National Centre for Sensor Research and DCU Water Institute: "My role is to look below ground at the soil. Healthy soil is really important for healthy food, so I'll be looking at levels of organic matter, seeing if there's a diverse set of micro-organisms living there (which is what you want) and other important aspects like

soil nutrients and acidity, which affects how living things can use those nutrients.” [Read more.](#)

Additional soil health marketing communications materials from the soil health communications team are in development, so stay tuned for further updates. As always, please feel free to contact me at any time if you need additional information or would like to offer contributions to the Update. 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.*

