



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Soil Health is the Goal!

Integrated Conservation Cropping Systems is the Right System

November, 2011



SOIL HEALTH = CONSERVATION CROPPING SYSTEMS

No (NEVER)-Till / Strip-Till + Cover Crops and Crop Rotations + Precision Nutrient and Pest Management + Buffers

KEY POINTS

- Soil health addresses multiple priority resource issues
- NRCS has a focused message to farmers, the public, and employees
- Farmers perceive changes to their current management as **RISK** that impedes adoption

High Quality technical assistance, education, and planning directly to the farmer is essential = **NRCS** is the **key** agency capable of helping farmers achieve soil health and the associated benefits

WHY FARMERS WANT HEALTHY SOILS:

- Decreased inputs (diesel, time, labor, nutrients, pesticides)
- Increased Soil Health
 - ◊ Organic matter = carbon
 - ◊ Reduced compaction
 - ◊ Nutrient sequestration and cycling (less inputs)
 - ◊ Increased water holding capacity and infiltration
 - ◊ Structural stability
 - ◊ Yield protection
 - ◊ "Insurance" against extremes in weather, input costs, markets

WHY THE PUBLIC NEEDS HEALTHY SOILS:

- Less energy (irrigation, nutrients, pesticides) and fuel needs
- Water quality (reduces nutrient and sediment loading)
- Air quality (reduces sediment, carbon, and nitrous oxide emissions)
- Ensures a stable, sustainable, secure, healthy domestic food source
- Increased infiltration = reduced runoff = **reduced flooding AND drought protection**
- Wildlife habitats

WHY USDA/NRCS IS FOCUSING ON SOIL HEALTH

- Healthy soils address multiple resource concerns across the nation
- Soil Health ensures **relevance** and **confidence** in NRCS from all of agriculture
- Farmers see that conservation makes sense and money
- Low technical and financial assistance needs
- Less need for expensive, high technical assistance practices (structures, waterways, etc.)
- Applicable coast to coast, north to south; Large/small; traditional/organic; beginning/limited

RESULTS GET ON THE GROUND