



United States Department of Agriculture



Iowa Soil Health Plan

*Consistent Messaging
Train Our Workforce
Empower Our Partners*



Iowa

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

ia.nrcs.usda.gov/

Introduction

Soil Health is the foundation of natural resources conservation. Healthy, fully functioning soil provides an environment that sustains and nourishes plants, soil microbes and beneficial insects. Managing for soil health is one of the easiest and most effective ways for farmers to increase crop productivity while improving the environment. Positive results can often be realized immediately and last well into the future.

NRCS is committed to advancing the soil health movement in Iowa. The Iowa Soil Health Plan will be the framework for advancing the soil health movement. The following are the primary components that make up the Iowa Soil Health Plan: Consistent Messaging: Speak with 1 Voice, Train Our Workforce, and Empower Our Partners.

Consistent Messaging: Speak with 1 Voice

NRCS will be consistent in soil health messaging, speaking as ONE about the vision and direction we want to achieve to more sustainably protect our soil and water resources. The following elements have been identified as critical tasks in accomplishing this goal:

1. Create a consistent statewide message, using newsletters, news releases, and other avenues to share our vision throughout the state.
2. Develop a Soil Health Outreach Plan within each NRCS administrative area, which will include demonstration plots to increase participation and expansion of soil health.
3. Incorporate a soil health component into employee performance plans.
4. Include soil health self-development into Individual Development Plans (IDP), by adding soil health article readings, events, and trainings to each employee's plan.
5. Require District Conservationists and field staff to report on soil health successes as a regular agenda item during staff meetings. District Conservationists will also report on soil health successes to Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Commissioners at monthly SWCD Board meetings.
6. Encourage staff to engage in a soil health discussion during customer contacts.



District Conservationists will be asked to share soil health successes.



Train Our Workforce

NRCS will focus on training and improving the skills of our workforce to create a confident staff capable of selling the message.

1. Provide agronomic planning training to improve the skills of our workforce to accurately address resource concerns by utilizing proper management practice planning.
2. Train new employees in soil science, biology and ecosystem basics and give refresher training, as needed.
3. Provide advanced training on the various soil testing results interpretation (Haney, Phospholipid Fatty Acids - PLFA, Solvita).
4. Present a basic understanding of the economic benefits of soil health from a cash flow basis for farm profitability.
5. Provide opportunities to staff to receive on-farm training with commissioners and at the Plant Materials Center to improve knowledge and skills needed to communicate with farmers.
6. Organize small group continuing education opportunities through “shovel talks” and “train the trainer” sessions to improve knowledge and skills.
7. Create a temporary soil health response team to develop a “Talking Points” or “Sell” fact sheet to help staff with strategies for overcoming reasons why producers do not adopt soil health practices.
8. Evaluate current tools that Field Offices have available, and conduct a needs inventory for additional tools
9. Develop area soil health committees/cadres to lead the charge on soil health plots and trials. Implement practical field trials with farmers that employees can use to engage producers.



Training staff is an important component of Iowa's Soil Health Plan.

Empower Our Partners

Expand beyond the reach of NRCS staff to include training and empowering new and traditional partners to assist with the Soil Health vision for Iowa.

1. Create a Soil Health 101 economic basics class for partners.
2. Continue and add to existing field days and farmer success panels to expand outreach and education efforts.
3. Expand on small group discussions and “shovel talks” within the core partnership.
4. Teach partners how to effectively transition into cover crop use, and ways to improve opportunities for success.
5. Facilitate trainings with technical service providers, certified crop advisors, ag retailers and producers so they can share experiences and learn from each other, and in some cases provide effective technical assistance to customers.





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