Virginia NRCS Strategic Plan for Soil Health Promotion & Implementation, May 2020

Prepared by Chris Lawrence, VA NRCS State Cropland Agronomist
chris.lawrence@usda.gov / 804/287-1680

A. Document Purpose

This document summarizes the NRCS strategic plan for promoting soil health in Virginia in 2020 and beyond. We expect this plan to be used by VA NRCS managers and staff as follows:

- It helps explain the scope and nature of the soil health-related activities that we plan to conduct.
- It helps convey the tone and terminology that we recommend using in VA NRCS soil health-related messaging.
- It will be one method to help determine which future soil health-related proposed projects and activities should receive priority for funding, staffing, and action by VA NRCS.

As explained below, VA NRCS has taken and will continue to take a very partnership-oriented approach in our soil health efforts. Therefore, we expect many of the strategies and action items in this document to overlap with those of other VA partners and the overall VA Soil Health Coalition. We want to emphasize, however, that this document is solely intended to guide VA NRCS activities and priorities. We do not intend to speak for or represent the plans of the VA Soil Health Coalition or any other partner organization with this document.

This plan already integrates significant partner and stakeholder perspectives. We expect this strategic plan to be a living document that evolves over time and we welcome on-going partner and stakeholder input to help shape that evolution. We believe that partners will in turn benefit from reading this plan when they set out to define their own soil health-related priorities and plans.

B. VA NRCS Soil Health Definition

Soil health is a broad term that appeals to an ever-wider range of stakeholders, including some who may define soil health in very different ways. Now more than ever, we believe the right way to begin any document or project on soil health is to define what is meant when we say, "soil health."

As explained in the following paragraphs, the term "soil health" has two key levels of meaning for VA NRCS. It has both a narrower technical meaning and a broader strategic meaning. It is important to understand that, whenever we use the term "soil health" in this document, we intend to invoke both of those levels of meaning.

Figure 1. VA NRCS Circle of Soil Health Principles

1. Narrower technical meaning: Soil properties & management principles

For VA NRCS, "soil health" has first and foremost a narrower technical meaning tied to the following definition: Soil health is "the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans." Basically, soil health is how well the soil does its

core jobs – supporting maximum plant growth with minimum inputs, absorbing precipitation from even the most violent weather events with minimum runoff, etc.

In this technical context, soil health can simply mean a combination of physical, chemical, and biological properties that can be observed or measured in the field. More specifically, soil health refers to a subset of dynamic soil properties that can be enhanced through mid- to long-term management (such as topsoil aggregate stability), as opposed to dynamic properties that can be changed with short-term management (such as topsoil pH) or inherent properties which can't be changed at all (such as depth to bedrock). Thus, soil health is something real that farmers, conservationists, or soil scientists can potentially touch, see, assess, rate, and compare.

We also often use the term "soil health" to refer to the management strategies, principles, and associated practices involved in improving the above dynamic soil properties. It is widely recognized that the key strategy for improving these soil properties is building soil organic matter (SOM). For VA NRCS, the key to improving soil health properties is not just building total SOM, but also focusing more specifically on enhancing the living fraction of SOM (i.e., boosting the amount and diversity of biological activity in the topsoil). Successfully pursuing this strategy in turn requires maximizing implementation of the four core principles listed below. These soil health principles apply universally to all farms, regardless of enterprises, size, or production style or philosophy. In other words, these principles apply to cropland, grassland, large grain farms, small organic vegetable farms, etc.

- Keep soil covered – ideally with both dead residues and living canopy
- Minimize soil disturbance – from tillage, compaction, overgrazing, and toxic or disruptive amendments
- Maximize living roots – both the amount present and the percentage of the calendar year during which they are present
- Energize with diversity – of crops, animals, and organic matter inputs

These four principles are also illustrated in the "Circle of Soil Health Principles" diagram that VA NRCS and some VA Soil Health Coalition partners have used for many years (see page 1).

2. Broader strategic meaning: Regenerative agriculture mindset & movement

"Soil health" can also have a broader, more strategic level of meaning. This broader meaning is tied to a big idea – one that is still relatively new to many in the agriculture and conservation community. The big idea is that it might be possible to farm not simply in a way that slows or stops soil degradation, but in a way that in fact reverses it. Farmers might not just be able to make a living, but maybe make a better living and have a better life, by farming in a way that not only regenerates the soil and improves its productivity, but also enhances its capacity to capture and store water, hold and cycle nutrients, etc.

In this strategic context, "soil health" can refer to a regenerative farming mindset that sees improved soil management as a major win-win opportunity for agriculture and the environment. Farmers who have adopted this soil health mindset tend to be more focused on long-term agronomic and economic performance, recognizing that the payback from soil stewardship is not immediate. They tend to have a more optimistic and innovative outlook, inspired by the way their improved soil husbandry incrementally leads to lower input costs, better yields, and other production efficiencies. These

farmers also tend to gravitate towards an increasingly holistic perspective over time – they often graduate from simply trying to save time and money by making fewer tillage passes or cutting the number of days they feed hay; to purposefully managing for enhanced soil biology; to ultimately recognizing that the entire farm is an ecosystem that runs most efficiently when they try to mimic, rather than fight against, nature's rules.

In this broader context, the term "soil health" can also refer to:

- A conservation sales pitch that capitalizes on "humic hope" and the intrinsic appeal to both growers and society of a strategy that might simultaneously improve the land, farmers' lives and livelihoods, and the environmental performance of agriculture.
- An authentic farmer movement that has already had an unmistakable impact on an important subset of mainstream farmers in Virginia and far beyond.

C. VA NRCS Core Soil Health Goal

The core goal guiding our VA NRCS Strategic Plan is increased implementation of soil health management systems on the land, both in the near-term and the longer-term.

A very wide range of activities, from the most complex soil biology research to distributing the most basic earthworm cartoons for kindergarten education, can potentially fall under today's broad umbrella of soil health. Increased soil health implementation is the key yardstick against which VA NRCS will evaluate and prioritize the merit of supporting, funding, or undertaking soil health-related activities.

This means that VA NRCS will try to prioritize soil health projects, proposals, and partnerships that we deem most likely to directly or indirectly, in the near term or long term, meaningfully impact land manager decisions and actions.

D. VA NRCS Core Soil Health Strategies

The following are overarching strategies that have helped VA NRCS achieve success in the first years of our soil health initiative, which we officially kicked off in 2013. We will continue to rely on these strategies as we promote soil health into the future.

1. Partnership

From the start, VA NRCS recognized that leveraging partnerships was key to maximizing our soil health education, demonstration, and implementation impact.

We could potentially cite many examples illustrating our existing soil health partnership emphasis; one of the best is our past use of the NRCS state-level Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program. Since 2010, VA NRCS has granted a total of more than $1.75 million to simultaneously orient in-state partners towards our VA NRCS soil health priorities while empowering them to innovate in the areas of soil health outreach, research, and demonstration. These match grant funds have helped support more than 25 different in-state soil health CIG projects conducted by Virginia educational institutions, Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and other non-profit entities.

Another example of the VA NRCS emphasis on soil health partnership is the VA Soil Health Coalition. We established the Coalition to help unite partners under an agency-neutral banner rather than emphasizing NRCS "ownership" of the soil health topic. We invited partners to formally join by sending a letter pledging support of VA NRCS soil health principles. The Coalition now includes a particularly wide range of partners and, as explained in more detail below, represents a key foundation that we expect to build upon in the future.

As we move forward, VA NRCS will continue to make partnership a cornerstone of our soil health strategy.

2. Communication

Success with soil health promotion is often just as much about how the message is conveyed – the effectiveness of the communication method – as it is about the content of the message. Two guiding principles we have explicitly embraced since starting our VA NRCS soil health campaign have been to "keep it simple" and to focus as much as possible on communication strategies that resonate with our core clients – videos of farmers relating their success stories, dramatic hands-on demonstrations, etc.

In part due to the effectiveness of the above communication approach, VA NRCS Agronomists Chris Lawrence (cropland and soil health technical lead) and J.B. Daniel (forage and grassland technical lead) are widely recognized and relied upon across VA and beyond as highly-effective soil health instructors and educational event organizers. This duo has helped lead, organize, or teach at least 269 soil health-related events involving a total of more than 22,600 participants since 2013. Note that these statistics do not reflect soil health outreach conducted by VA NRCS field office personnel, nor does it account for the many thousands of viewers who have watched a wide range of soil health video products created by or otherwise made possible with VA NRCS support.

We will continue our existing emphasis on high-quality VA NRCS soil health communication, education, and outreach.

3. Inclusion

Our long-standing emphasis on being inclusive in VA NRCS soil health efforts takes multiple forms.

One of our guiding principles has been to focus on what soil health stakeholders have in common rather than on where they differ. For example, we have avoided an exclusive emphasis on specific practices – such as continuous no-till – that don't work in some farming systems. Instead, we focus on broader principles like minimizing disturbance and unifying goals like building the quantity and diversity of life in the soil. These are concepts that VA farmers who often hold widely different views on some aspects of soil management – for example, no-till grain farmers and organic vegetable producers – can agree on. The net result: We can proudly say that today we can count a particularly broad range of Virginia stakeholder organizations as supporters of soil health.

Another guiding principle of the VA NRCS approach to promoting soil health is to avoid traditional "top-down" or "us/them" models for training and learning. For example, we recommend "learning together" – inviting not only different styles of farmers, but also agency staff and other soil health stakeholders, to learn side by side in the same audience. We also emphasize "learning from each

other." This means striving for a participatory approach with farmer practitioners serving as speakers at the front of the room rather than as passive recipients of information sitting in the back.

Another aspect of our inclusive approach is illustrated by the "unlock the secrets of the soil" slogan in our VA circle of soil health principles diagram (see page 1). The best soil health outcomes typically happen when individual growers and their advisors are deeply engaged in investigating, thinking about, and developing a plan of action customized to the farmer's situation. Thus, a guiding concept is to avoid presenting NRCS or other agency personnel as "the experts" with all the soil health answers. Instead, we want farmers and field-level agency staff to feel empowered and to actively participate in "unlocking the secrets" of exactly how to improve soil health on their farms.

4. Innovation

Soil health is no longer new in VA. In order to keep attracting and holding the interest of our target audiences, we need to keep evolving, adjusting our advice and messages, and delivering that information in innovative ways. We can cite many examples illustrating that an emphasis on innovation has always been a strength of the VA NRCS soil health campaign. A key to our future success will be to continue that approach.

5. Inspiration

It is often said that farmers are businesspeople first and foremost and that the numbers – yields and dollars – are the key to motivating them to change. Some of our soil health partners are also very much focused on numbers. For example, Land Grant soil health researchers are typically paid to objectively quantify soil properties, not to make qualitative generalizations about them.

Recognizing the importance of the above numbers to our clients and partners is crucial to an effective soil health promotion campaign. For example, we must never forget the fact that our farmers must above all keep up with their short-term financial obligations, regardless of the long-term promise of enhanced soil productivity. There is no faster way to discredit a soil health sales pitch than to oversell it. Overselling can range from overstating the speed at which soil properties will change after conversion to management intensive grazing to promising farmers that they will see near-term economic payback from planting a cover crop.

Notwithstanding the above, we must also recognize the need to include in our soil health promotion and programs an element of inspiration. Conservation has always been in part about an ethic and assigning value to something greater than short-term economic returns. NRCS exists in part to help foster that ethic.

As explained previously, "soil health" to VA NRCS is not just about science and numbers. It is also about a forward-looking, optimistic, innovative, and more holistic mindset. Our past success can be explained in part by the way we have tried to balance realism and practical advice with an element of inspiration and ethic in our soil health messaging. This is another important VA NRCS soil health strategy that we will continue to follow.

E. VA NRCS Soil Health Priorities

1. Innovative staffing & capacity building

Too much work, lots of different priorities, and not enough staff at all levels, from our Field Offices to our State Office – this is the single biggest factor limiting the ability of VA NRCS to help farmers put more soil health management systems on the ground. Therefore, VA NRCS is pivoting to making creative staffing and capacity building a cornerstone of our soil health strategy. Here are three innovative staffing approaches that we are pursuing:

- We will seek to establish a central structure by which one or more key partners can use grant funds or other "soft" monies, potentially aggregated from a range of sources, to hire full- or part-time conservation personnel who will be embedded in VA NRCS offices and devoted to promoting VA NRCS soil health priorities.
- We will encourage partners to find and/or devote resources to hiring personnel who will help promote VA NRCS soil health priorities, even if those hires are not embedded or working directly with VA NRCS.
- We will seek to find new ways to enlist the help of farmers and other field-level practitioners who can serve as part-time, paid soil health mentors, technical advisors, and implementation troubleshooters. This includes individuals who might have great practical agronomic knowledge and excellent credibility with local farmers, but who might not for a range of reasons be good candidates for traditional NRCS or partner agency positions. We believe that a cadre of such farmer mentors, hired through creative partnership approaches, might significantly help address some of our local capacity shortages.

2. Energizing and expanding VA Soil Health Coalition

As explained above, Virginia NRCS established the VA Soil Health Coalition in order to formally unite VA soil health partners. While many key partners have joined the Coalition, inadequate staff time to lead meetings and spearhead coordination has meant that we have not been able to capitalize on the full potential of the Coalition for optimizing communication and collaboration across the partnership.

A new priority for VA NRCS is to help partners secure external funds and hire a VA Soil Health Coalition Coordinator. This person's role will be to help energize and expand the organization while enhancing communication and coordination among members.

3. Moving beyond no-till and cover crops: From soil health to "integrated conservation agronomy"

Virginia NRCS has long emphasized that maximizing soil health benefits requires "systems, not shortcuts" – coordinated layering of multiple practices over time to maximize implementation of all soil health principles. Nevertheless, to some Virginia partners, "soil health" is still just a synonym for "no-till + cover crops." Meanwhile, other key elements of cropland soil health management systems like diversified crop rotation, organic amendments, and soil compaction management are widely ignored – both inside and outside Virginia. Finally, most agency personnel treat nutrient management – a priority practice for both VA farmers and water quality advocates – as completely unrelated to soil health management and associated changes in SOM and soil biological activity.

In response to the above, VA NRCS will now pivot to more strongly emphasize the need for and value of integrating a wider range of practices into soil health management systems, particularly on cropland. Of special interest is exploring and building awareness of the relationship between improved soil health and soil nutrient-supplying capacity.

We have now coined the term "Integrated Conservation Agronomy" (ICA) to describe a more holistic approach that counters the phenomenon described above by which many individuals and agencies in the agriculture sector tend to "disconnect" soil health from other key cropland conservation agronomy practices. We intend to use our new partnership-funded, NRCS-embedded staff to help promote the ICA term and concept.

It is important to emphasize that pastures make up a significant component of the overall agricultural landscape in VA. Improving grazing management and associated grassland soil health is already an important part of the VA NRCS soil health promotion effort. We intend to include grazing and grassland management under the broad umbrella of Integrated Conservation Agronomy.

4. Greater emphasis on soil health assessment

How should we measure soil health? This has been and continues to be a hot and hotly debated topic across the broader soil health community.

During the first phase of our soil health campaign, VA NRCS made a strategic decision to not focus on soil health testing and quantitative assessment. Our focus instead has been on promoting easy-to-understand soil health implementation principles. We have generally supported our implementation pitch with a combination of farmer success stories and soil health demonstrations – from rainfall simulator presentations to on-farm test plots – that show obvious evidence of soils changing and outcomes improving. While this strategy has been effective at inspiring action and building consensus around the VA NRCS soil health message for many years, the time is right for a next phase that includes greater emphasis on soil health assessment.

Our shift to greater emphasis on assessment will require tackling a number of challenging issues. We will need to work closely with partners, in particular our VA Land Grant University experts as well as NRCS Soil Health Division personnel, in order to share ideas, evaluate options, and forge consensus wherever possible. Although there is much to explore and learn, we expect to emphasize the following as top priorities in our VA NRCS soil health assessment initiative:

- **Starting with the end in mind**. Our choice of soil health assessment methods should be guided by the intended use of the assessment results. This means our first question should always be: "Why are we assessing soil health?" The answer to that question should in turn be used to help answer the next, more frequently asked question: "What soil health assessment strategy or test method should we use?"
- **Soil health assessment is more than lab testing.** Soil health assessment can and should be broader than just quantitative laboratory measurement of soil sample properties. We suggest that soil health assessment can involve four distinct strategies: (1) indirect evaluation of soil function based on farmer observations of soil performance; (2) indirect evaluation of soil function based on rating or modeling the farmer's past soil management methods and cropping system; (3) direct evaluation of soil function in the field using qualitative or quantitative

methods; and (4) direct evaluation of soil function (or indicators of soil function) through quantiative laboratory analysis. As indicated above, which of these soil health assessment strategies (or combinations of strategies) are best will vary based on the user's site- and case-specific goals. VA NRCS sees a need to offer Virginians better practical guidance and education on all four of these soil health assessment strategies.

- **Priority #1 for lab testing: Living / labile / active fraction of SOM**. We need to cut through the confusion associated with the wide range of indicators and associated soil health laboratory test methods under discussion today. As we shift to greater emphasis on lab testing, the top priority for VA NRCS is to focus first on the very small subset of procedures that have already been shown to be practical and relevant for quantifying the living / labile / active fraction of SOM in the eastern U.S. There are at least two compelling reasons for this: (1) This is the fraction of SOM that our entire VA NRCS soil health promotion campaign is explicitly aiming to enhance; it should therefore be a top priority for quantification. (2) Some key soil health indicators that are responsive to management – aggregate stability, infiltration rate, earthworm counts, etc. – are not good candidates for lab testing, at least not early on. These indicators can potentially be assessed in the field. They **can't** be quantified in the lab with a standard soil fertility sample. In contrast, the living / labile / active fraction of SOM is truly invisible. Not only is there no practical way to assess it in the field, but this indicator **can** be quantified in the lab with a standard fertility soil sample. When it comes to soil health lab testing, the living fraction of SOM is clearly the place to start.
- **Next step: Correlation to other properties and management recommendations**. There is already published evidence that more living / labile / active SOM in the soil is associated with changes in soil properties of interest to farmers, such as nitrogen (N) mineralization potential. The next logical step is to continue looking for and validating such correlations between key soil properties and living / labile / active SOM test results – particularly soil test results from Virginia farms aggressively implementing soil health principles. The ultimate goal is to identify ways in which farmers who embrace soil health principles can use testing not just to verify that their soil is changing, but to help refine fertilization and other crop management decisions.
- **It's not about the numbers, it's about the understanding.** Although our individual clients will have varying reasons for quantifying soil health, VA NRCS has one overarching reason for shifting to greater emphasis on soil health assessment: To help our audiences take another step forward in understanding how improved management can potentially change soils and lead to better production, economic, and environmental outcomes. What will it take to achieve this greater understanding? Regardless of how good the methods might be, soil health testing alone is unlikely to get us there. We also need a framework of information and education to accompany that testing. Although we don't propose to aim for something so comprehensive, we see the Cornell Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health (CASH) as a good example of a potential model upon which to develop a regionally-adpated soil health assessment approach for Virginia.
- **Avoiding measurement without meaning.** Whether or not we ever come up with a new soil health testing framework for Virginia, our farmers and partners will continue to hear about and have access to a wide range of soil testing options that can be instructive for soil health

assessment – including options that are already available today. For example, we need to remember that even the results of standard soil fertility tests routinely run in Virginia include measurements such as total organic matter that can provide important soil health insights for certain purposes. A key priority for VA NRCS is to educate our clients and staff about interpreting soil test results in a soil health context. Our emphasis should be above all on avoiding "measurement without meaning." Of course, one obvious strategy for achieving this is to recommend that Virginians avoid using tests that do not have adequate state-level calibration and associated interpretations. But another is to explain the opportunities for (and limits to) using soil test results for carefully planned on-farm comparisons and decisions, even when no state-wide soil health-related calibration or interpretation system exists. This is another example of the need to focus not just on test methods and numbers, but also on understanding and meaning.

5. Enhancing inter-state soil health collaboration

NRCS-led soil health efforts in VA to date have tended to be "inward looking" – in other words, we have not partnered much with colleagues in neighboring states. Another pivot we propose to make is greater communication and coordination with out-of-state soil health partners. This includes working more closely with NRCS NHQ Soil Health Division (SHD) staff as well as state-level soil health advocates with NRCS and/or other organizations in North Carolina, Maryland, and other nearby states.

F. Specific Objectives & Action Items

State Cropland Agronomist Chris Lawrence will continue to serve as the VA NRCS lead technical contact on soil health in general, as well as the lead for issues related to soil health implementation on cropland. State Forage and Grassland Agronomist J.B. Daniel will continue to serve as the lead for issues related to soil health on grassland. Unless stated otherwise, Lawrence or Daniel will be responsible for leading NRCS implementation of the action items listed below.

1. Soil health staffing & capacity building

a. Integrated Conservation Agronomy (ICA) staffing strategy

Work with VA Tech (and potentially other partenrs) to hire one or more soft-money-funded, partner-employed, NRCS-embedded personnel to assist in carrying out all of the action items below. Depending on the resources available and a range of other factors, those personnel might potentially be embedded with VA NRCS at any of the following levels: State Office, Area Office, or Field Office.

b. Farmer-to-farmer networks and mentoring

- Find innovative ways to engage farmer mentors in helping to promote and implement soil health principles on both cropland and grassland.
- Collaborate with partners in this effort, especially VA Tech, VA No-till Alliance (VANTAGE), VA Forage & Grassland Council (VFGC), VA Association for Biological Farming (VABF), and Common Grain Alliance (CGA).

c. VA Soil Health Coalition Coordinator

- Assist the VA Soil Health Coalition in hiring a full-time, soft-money-funded Coordinator for the VA Soil Health Coalition.
- Continue to help in carrying out some of the partnership-building and cross-agency coordination functions of this new position until it can be filled.

2. Soil health technical resources

- Research, create, and/or update technical documents or other resources to help VA NRCS staff, partners, and clients more effectively plan and implement soil health management systems on Virginia cropland and grassland.
- Whenever possible, collaborate with VA Tech or other relevant partners to expand the audience and relevance of the resulting products.
- Key topics to address include, but are not limited to:
    - Specific elements of cropland soil management systems (cover cropping, crop rotation, soil compaction prevention)
    - Multiple aspects of soil health assessment, potentially applicable to both cropland and grasslands.
    - Soil health/nutrient management interactions, potentially applicable to both cropland and grassland.

3. Soil health training & education

a. VA NRCS staff training

- Maximize the percentage of VA NRCS field staff who complete the national NRCS Soil Health & Sustainability Course. This includes hosting this course in Virginia as we have done in the past.
- Continue to provide on-going training and updates on soil health topics for both cropland and grassland at least annually to VA NRCS field staff through formal meetings and webinars.

b. Partner & client education

- Continue serving as invited speakers, teachers, organizers, or advisors for wide range of soil health education efforts targeting audiences ranging from agency staff to industry and farmers.

4. Soil health messaging, marketing, and outreach

- Work with VA Soil Health Coalition and selected partners, especially VA Tech, to maximize consistency in soil health messaging across partner organizations (“consistent messages carry farther”).
- Look for opportunities to continue innovative VA NRCS soil health outreach efforts, including new video projects to highlight soil health farmer case studies and other success stories.

- Regularly confer with VA NRCS Public Affairs manager in fulflling the above action items.

5. Soil health implementation

a. Technical assistance (TA) at Field Office level

- Continue to help NRCS Field Office staff and/or clients plan and implement soil health management systems. This includes providing technical advice, field visits, troubleshooting, and other assistance as needed.

b. Financial Assistance (FA) – Program design & development

- Continue to advise and assist VA NRCS Programs manager and staff in adjusting FA programs (where possible) to better incentivize VA farmer adotion of soil health management principles.

6. Partnership promotion & leadership

a. VA Soil Health Coalition

- Continue to help build the VA Soil Health Coalition and enhance communication, coordination, and teamwork among its members.

b. Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

- Continue to help oversee and coordinate technical aspects of on-going VA NRCS CIG-funded soil health partnership research, demonstration, and outreach projects.
- Help publicize and distribute findings of CIG-funded soil health partnership projects.
- Continue looking for opportunities to use CIG funding, both state-level and national-level, to support innovative VA partner projects pertaining to soil health research, demonstration, outreach, implemenation, etc.

c. Other core partnerships

- Continue to work directly with and to otherwise support key VA partners promoting soil health education and implementation. Examples of this include serving formal advisory roles to leadership of VANTAGE, VFGC, and VA Crop Production Association (VACPA).
- Shift to also working more closely with NRCS NHQ SHD staff as well as partners in other states.

7. Soil health quantification & tracking

- Work with VA Soil Health Coalition partners to explore new ways to track, quantify, and “take credit for” increased adoption of soil health management systems across VA.