

SOIL HEALTH: BEYOND FERTILITY



WHY IS THIS NEW CONCEPT IMPORTANT?

An organism's composition affects its outputs. Soil, a natural resource, living thing, and foundation for all plant life, follows this biology. Healthy soil offers crops an opportunity to grow, and yield, to their full potential.

But how do we build soil's health for optimal output and longevity?

Turn over to find out more.

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Soil microbes have a big job.

- Healthy soil is half composed of pore space that contains air, water, and microorganisms.
- Microorganisms improve nutrient availability, fight harmful microorganisms, decompose residue, and benefit from soil health.

Organic matter is key.

- Organic matter (OM) increases water holding capacity of soil and protects it from temperature changes.
- Building OM can boost soil health.

Tillage/plowing leaves lasting effects.

- Tillage causes destruction of pore space through compaction and crusting while destroying earthworms and their habitat.
- No-till cropping systems harbor many earthworms, which can double in population in long-term no-till fields.

Consider these tips to build soil health:

- Incorporate management practices that build organic matter in soil
- Test the soil at least every four years
- Devise what is best for your fields' soil health: till or no-till
- Utilize cover crops to retain and build nitrogen and reduce erosion
- Work with your landlords to improve soil health for the long-term

BOTTOM LINE: SOIL HEALTH CENTERS ON ORGANIC MATTER AND MICROBIAL ACTIVITY. BUILD IT WITH TOOLS THAT WORK IN YOUR MANAGEMENT SCHEME.

References:

Natural Resources Conservation Service. (n.d.). Retrieved July 08, 2016, from <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/>



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