



Creating Common Ground: Activities of the Soil Health Dialog Workgroup

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The concept of Soil Health has come to forefront as a soil management concept for soil scientists, agronomists, producers, land-use planners, and environmental advocates. Although many see this simply as a way to increase organic matter in the soil it is much more than that and has implications to a broader management decisions. A diverse group of stake holders ranging from scientists to consultants, conventional to organic farmers, governmental to NGOs met to start a dialog about soil health with an overarching goal to adopt practices that will improve soil health across a wide area and for a wide variety of land uses. The group recognized the critical need for using soil health as a cornerstone of sustainable soil management. The group also realized that a consistent and coherent message about soil health needed to be developed that would be inclusive to all stake holders. Furthermore the group recognized that if soil health is to be promoted we all need to know and agree on how to measure it and interpret the results. The first outcome from the meeting was the creation of several teams comprised of individuals with the diverse interests as list above. The first was tasked to review and develop a definition of soil health. The first group, after much debate, decided on the adoption of the USDA-NRCS definition of Soil Health as the most effective way to begin. This definition was presented as a press release from the Farm Foundation in early December 2013 in conjunction with World Soil Day. The second group was tasked to review, develop or recommend standard measurement techniques to assess soil health. The methods group is in the process of reviewing methods and hopes to have a preliminary list out for broader review by mid-year. This presentation reviews current progress and asks for input from the Soil Science community at large.