USDA United States Department of Agriculture

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

UNLOCK YOUR FARM'S POTENTIAL
Do Not Disturb

unlock the SECRETS IN THE SOIL

If soil health is your goal, till as little as possible.

Tillage can destroy soil organic matter and structure along with the habitat that soil organisms need. Tillage, especially during warmer months, reduces water infiltration, increases runoff and can make the soil less productive. Tillage disrupts the soil's natural biological cycles, damages the structure of the soil, and makes soil more susceptible to erosion. Transitioning to tillage systems that increase soil surface cover and limit soil disturbance and loosening is an effective approach to building a healthy soil.

Benefits of Reduced-Till/No-Till

- **Aiding in Plant Growth** – Soils managed with conservation tillage or no-till for several years contain more organic matter and moisture for plant use. Healthy soils cycle crop nutrients, support root growth, absorb water and sequester carbon more efficiently.
- **Reducing Soil Erosion** – Soil that is covered year-round with crops, crop residue, grass or cover crops is much less susceptible to erosion from wind and water. For cropping systems, practices like no-till keep soil undisturbed throughout the entire cropping season.
- **Saving Money** – Farmers can save money on fuel and labor by decreasing tillage operations. Improving nutrient cycling allows farmers to potentially reduce the amount of supplemental nutrients required to maintain yields, further reducing input costs.
- **Providing Wildlife Habitat** – Crop residue, grass and cover crops provide food and escape for wildlife.

Production Inputs

Soils can be disturbed if inputs are not applied properly, potentially disrupting the delicate relationship between plants and soil organisms. Soil Health Management Systems help minimize that potential disturbance, while maximizing nutrient cycling, which can lead to greater profitability for producers.

Livestock Grazing

Improperly managed grazing can disturb the soil. There are several ways to graze livestock to reduce environmental impacts. For example, implementing a rotational grazing system instead of allowing livestock to continuously graze pasture allows pasture plants to rest and regrow.

Soil Health Management Systems

Implementing Soil Health Management Systems can lead to increased organic matter, more soil organisms, reduced soil compaction and improved nutrient storage and cycling. As an added bonus, fully functioning, healthy soils absorb and retain more water, making them less susceptible to runoff and erosion. This means more water will be available for crops when they need it. Soil Health Management Systems can allow farmers to enjoy cost savings from reduced inputs as well as more consistent yields, increased crop quality, and increased resilience resulting from improved soil conditions.

More Information

To learn more about Soil Health Management Systems and the technical and financial assistance available visit **farmers.gov/conserve/soil-health** or contact your local NRCS office. To find your local NRCS office, visit **farmers.gov/service-center-locator**.

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