



PRESS RELEASE
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New initiative focuses on critical role of soil health

DECEMBER 4, 2013: Farm Foundation, NFP and The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation today announced the launch of a new initiative designed to bring attention to the critical role of soil health in the challenge of feeding 9 billion people by 2050. This announcement is being made to mark World Soil Day on Dec. 5.

Through the leadership of the two foundations, the Soil Health Initiative will bring recognition to the central role of soil in productive agricultural systems, and establish a strategic plan to address soil health issues.

“Soil health is a key factor in any agricultural production system, whether conventional or organic, yet soil is too often ignored or overshadowed by other factors,” says Noble Foundation President Bill Buckner. “It is critical that producers—the people working directly with the land—be in close communication with researchers and policymakers to ensure that their challenges are recognized and our soils are protected and sustained for future generations.”

The Initiative evolved from discussions by 25 leaders representing conventional and organic agriculture, science and research, land managers and policymakers about the best tools to measure, promote and research soil health. This core group will be expanded to five working groups that will: find consensus on a definition of “soil health” to bring consistency and continuity to related work; define a standard for measuring soil health; identify opportunities for specific research work; prepare a white paper outlining the current state of soil health; and develop a strategic plan to broadly advance work on soil health issues.

The first working group completed its work, reaching consensus on a definition of soil health: *The continued capacity of the soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals and humans.*

“This definition is used by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service,” explains Working Group Chair David Lindbo, Ph.D. of North Carolina State University and President of the Soil Science Society of America. “It sounds simple, but establishing a basis of

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understanding of what soil health concerns is the first step to move forward with universal acceptance of soil health as a critical need.”

The working group identifying a standard of measure for soil health is expected to complete its work on or before Feb. 1, 2014. A strategic plan for addressing soil health issues is expected to be completed on or before April 2, 2014. Once this foundational work is completed, deadlines will be established for the remaining work groups.

“We need to recognize that soil is a common denominator for productive agricultural systems,” said Farm Foundation President Neil Conklin. “With a foundational base of defining soil health and standard measurements for soil health, we can move forward to build research plans and discuss potential public policies that enhance soil health moving forward.”

The issue of soil health became prominent in discussions of *A Dialogue on Food and Agriculture in the 21st Century*, a Farm Foundation initiative to promote discussions on the challenges to be addressed if agriculture is to feed 9 billion people in 2050 while protecting and maintaining natural resources. Buckner, a Dialogue Project Steering Committee member, was part of wide-ranging discussions on the role of science and technology in agriculture and the food system, which quickly focused on soil health. Those discussions were the seed for the Soil Health Initiative. Soil health has been a focus of the Noble Foundation since its inception in 1945.

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Farm Foundation, NFP serves as a catalyst for sound public policy by providing objective information to foster a deeper understanding of issues shaping the future for agriculture, food systems and rural regions. The Foundation does not lobby or advocate. Our 80-year reputation for objectivity allows us to bring together diverse stakeholders for discussions on economic and public policies issues.

The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation has focused on soil health since it was created by Lloyd Noble in 1945 to help protect the soil and safeguard the land for use by future generations by working directly with agricultural producers to effect change in regional soil health. An independent, nonprofit institute headquartered in Ardmore, Okla., the Noble Foundation conducts direct operations, including assisting farmers and ranchers, and conducting plant science research and agricultural programs to enhance agricultural productivity regionally, nationally and internationally.