



An Introduction to The Virginia Soil Health Coalition

For years, many farmers and organizations across Virginia have been promoting practices that improve soil health. Our understanding of the value and the benefits of healthy soils have deepened over time. We understand that regenerative agricultural systems focused on soil health strengthen the vitality and resilience of individual farms, our entire agricultural economy, and our natural environment.

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition envisions a thriving and diverse agricultural landscape in Virginia that is profitable, sustainable and resilient now and for future generations. To realize this vision, the Coalition facilitates communication and collaboration among partners across the Commonwealth to support farmers, leverage resources, and advance strategies that increase soil health and the understanding of its many co-benefits.

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition is committed to:

- ❖ Advancing a holistic approach to soil health through practices that sustain and regenerate the landscape
- ❖ Valuing and prioritizing the needs of Virginia's farmers
- ❖ Strengthening the resilience, productivity, and profitability of Virginia's farm economy
- ❖ Focusing on areas of alignment with a collaborative mindset
- ❖ Acknowledging different perspectives and contexts

The definition of soil health as put forth by NRCS is the continued capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals and humans. Soil health refers to the dynamic biological, chemical, and physical properties of soil that allow it to do this core job. A primary way these properties are supported is by building and enhancing soil organic matter or soil carbon. Soil health also refers to the holistic management of land that not only seeks to stop soil degradation but also seeks to build soil back up thereby providing diverse co-benefits. Those on-farm and ecosystem benefits include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ Increasing plants' access to soil nutrients
- ❖ Reducing fertilizer inputs
- ❖ Boosting and stabilizing crop yield
- ❖ Increasing a field's water holding capacity
- ❖ Suppressing plant disease
- ❖ Increasing a farm's resilience to drought and flood
- ❖ Reducing soil loss from fields and pasture
- ❖ Enhancing water quality
- ❖ Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- ❖ Increasing carbon sequestration or drawdown

We follow and support the four core principles of soil health management:

1. Keep the Soil Covered
2. Minimize Soil Disturbance
3. Maximize Living Roots
4. Energize with Diversity

Are you interested in learning more about or getting involved with the Virginia Soil Health Coalition?
Reach out to the Coalition Coordinator, Mary Sketch at mksketch2@vt.edu. (April 2021)

