



unlock your farm's potential

with innovative conservation practices

 unlock the
SECRETS
IN THE
SOIL

Exploring Innovative Approaches

It takes creative problem-solving to maintain the delicate balance between natural resource protection and profitability for today's farmers and ranchers. That's why the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has invested in partnership projects to explore and promote efficient, environmentally-friendly practices since 2004.

Funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Innovation Grants or CIGs are critical for developing and demonstrating new conservation approaches for America's private lands and strengthening rural communities. These projects all aim to investigate innovative ways to protect our nation's soil, water, air, plant and animal resources while maintaining or increasing farm productivity.

Over the past nine years, NRCS CIG projects have helped develop trading markets for water quality and shown how farmers and ranchers may use fertilizer, water and energy more efficiently. In 2012, NRCS in Virginia made soil health a priority for CIGs with dedicated funding for soil health projects.

Spotlighting Soil Health

Though soil conservation is our business, NRCS and our partners can learn as much about soil

health from farmers as farmers can learn from us. Grant projects allow us to promote a "culture of sharing" among farmers while exploring a broad range of soil topics relevant to almost every farmer, partner, and agricultural land user in Virginia.

CIGs also allow us to leverage resources such as funding, technical knowledge, staff for project monitoring, access to new technologies, education and outreach, and field demonstrations.

NRCS financial contributions are earmarked for on-farm activities where experimentation and observation can directly benefit farmers and increase understanding, acceptance, and implementation of soil health principles.

Focusing on Virginia Soils

Virginia NRCS has been improving soil health and soil quality through promotion of sound conservation practices such as conservation tillage, diverse crop rotations, and the use of cover crops for years.

Taking our soil health activities to the next level will require significant partner help and involvement to educate, demonstrate, and learn together how to build healthy soils in Virginia. Healthy soils can reduce nutrient loading and sediment runoff, increase efficiencies, and sustain wildlife habitat.

Through our state-level CIG program, NRCS in Virginia has helped fund a wide range of partner on-farm demonstration projects since 2010. A brief overview of current initiatives is listed below:

Virginia Cropland Projects	Start Date/ Duration	Recipient Group/ Contact Person	Target Area	NRCS Financial Contribution
Soil Health and Wallet Wealth in Intensive Dairy Systems	Fall 2013/ 2.5 years	American Farmland Trust/ Jim Baird	Shenandoah Valley & Northern Piedmont	\$75,000
Strip Tilling Vegetables to Boost Soil Organic Matter, Farmland Conservation and Grower Productivity	Fall 2013/ 2 years	Appalachian Sustainable Development/ Chick Fish	Southwest Virginia	\$32,913
Healthy Farms from the Soil Up: Finding Common Ground	Fall 2013/ 3 years	Virginia Tech/ Eric Bendfeldt	Shenandoah Valley & Northern Piedmont	\$74,102
Feasibility of Multi-Species Cover Crops in Central Virginia Cropping Systems to Affect Soil Quality	Fall 2012/ 3 years	Hanover-Caroline SWCD/ Jim Tate	Northeast VA	\$49,900
Innovative Cropping Systems Using Diverse Cover Crops and Manure Injection	Fall 2012/ 3 years	Virginia No-Till Alliance/ Doug Horn	Shenandoah Valley	\$39,515

Virginia Grazing Projects	Start Date/ Duration	Recipient Group/ Contact Person	Target Area	NRCS Financial Contribution
Improved Soil Health Through Livestock and Pasture Diversity: A Farm Demonstration	Fall 2013/ 3 years	Piedmont Environmental Council of Virginia/ Mike Kane	Northern Piedmont	\$62,276
Soil Health and Grazing Management: Putting Science into Practice	Fall 2013/ 3 years	Virginia Forage and Grassland Council/ Patricia Johnson	Statewide (Western Virginia Focus)	\$75,000
Managed Grazing for Improved Soil Health and Environmental Protection	Fall 2012/ 3 years	Virginia Tech/ Ben Tracy	West of Blue Ridge	\$75,000



State Resource Conservationist Chad Wentz and Cropland Agronomist Chris Lawrence examine test plots with CIG Project Director Jim Tate.

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