



United States Department of Agriculture



# PROTECT

## *Your Land, Your Soil, Your Investment, Your Family*

### LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS REQUIRE LONG-TERM CARE

Building soil health is a capital improvement. It is an investment. . . in your land. Soil health management practices build your soil.

Managing for soil health is one of the easiest and most effective ways to improve productivity and profitability while improving the environment.

Here's how your tenant farmers can improve soil health:

- Disturb the soil as little as possible.
- Grow as many different species of plants through rotations and a diverse mix of cover crops.
- Keep living roots growing in the soil as long as possible.
- Keep the soil surface covered with residue.

Soil health practices include no-till (never till), cover crops, nutrient management, prescriptive buffers, integrated weed and pest management, and crop rotations.

Building the health of the soil on your land may involve some changes in the tenant farmer's equipment, management or practices that can reduce yields over conventional farming practices in the short-term. However, most farmers report meeting or exceeding county production averages soon after implementing a soil health management system.

It important to know these investments in building soil health are quickly lost if subsequent tenant farmers return the land to conventional tillage and cropping practices—robbing your investments in the process.

### CONSIDER SOIL HEALTH/SOIL WEALTH-FOCUSED CONTRACT PROVISIONS

#### *Making good soil stewardship a priority*

A written farm lease often contains a provision requiring the tenant to farm the land in a “good stewardship manner” or it may include the use of conservation practices such as no-till and cover crops. A similar provision regarding the use of soil health management systems could be added to protect **your farm's most important asset. . . the soil.**

#### *Improving Tenure Security*

The duration of the lease agreement may be the most critical matter in encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices.

A lease of multiple years provides tenure security for the tenant, encouraging the adoption of long-term conservation practices, such as continuous no-till which decreases soil erosion, builds soil organic matter, and maintains conservation practices.

A longer tenure lease can also increase the farm tenant's connection to neighbors and the surrounding community. This aspect can encourage the increased use of sustainable conservation practices that can improve the area's environment by addressing resource issues such as water quality, water management, invasive plants, and more.



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## Ten Questions to Ask Your Tenant Farmer:

The purpose of these sample questions is to help you start a dialog with your tenant farmers about your long term goals for your property.

1. Is building soil organic matter an important farming goal for you? (If so, what experiences and/or successes have you had so far?)
2. How do you assess the health of the soil?
3. Do you test the soil at least once every 4 years?
4. Do you test and track soil organic matter?
5. Will you use no-till practices? (If so, what experience do you have? If not, would you consider using no-till?)
6. Will you use cover crops? (What experience have you had using cover crops?)
7. What other practices do you utilize to reduce soil loss?
8. Will you use integrated nutrient, weed and pest management practices?
9. Will you maintain and/or add conservation practices such as grassed waterways and buffers, as well as drainage systems?
10. How will your farming practices improve my land (as opposed to sustaining it)?



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about improving your land with soil health practices, please contact your local NRCS office.

[www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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