

FACT SHEET

Protect Your Land, Your Soil, Your Investment, Your Family

You and your farm operators can work together to protect AND improve the investment in your land that is taking care of you and your family. Consider using soil health management language in your future lease agreements to “build soil health and wealth.”

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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 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 diverse rotations.

Building the health of your soil health may involve changes in farmer’s equipment, management or practices that may reduce yields over conventional farming practices in the short-term. Most farmers report meeting or exceeding county production averages by implementing a soil health management system.

It important to know these investments in building soil health are quickly lost if subsequent 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 and husband-like manner” or with 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 term, or duration of the lease agreement is perhaps the most critical matter in encouraging the adoption of sustainable

TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR FARMER ABOUT SOIL HEALTH MANAGEMENT ON YOUR LAND

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)?

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 that decrease soil erosion, build soil organic matter nutrients, and maintain conservation practices.

A longer tenure lease can also increase the farm operator’s connection to neighbors and the surrounding community. This aspect can encourage sustainable practices affecting off-farm environmental factors, decreasing runoff from rainfall, as well as creating greater concern for the social and economic well-being of the community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about improving your land with soil health practices, please contact your local NRCS office. You can find your local NRCS office by visiting the Indiana NRCS website at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.