
May 30, 2014

SOIL HEALTH FIELD DAYS

Soil health has been a new buzz word in the media, with NRCS, Extension and the agricultural community, but what does improving soil health really mean? What are the measures of soil health?

Across the Eastern Corn Belt and Central Plains states, improving soil health by use of cover crops has tripled acres in each of the past two years. Although researchers and farmers have learned much about the soil biology, especially during the past two decades, producers still need more answers to many soil related questions. Further, University researchers, industry leaders, and commodity groups are linking to provide more science-based replicated research trials.

There are two new Soil Health Field Days scheduled in Nebraska to assist producers in gaining a deeper understanding about the science and biology of healthy soils. Scott Gonnerman, a no-till irrigation producer near Waco, NE, is hosting the first Soil Health Field Day location at his farm (6 miles north and 1 mile east of Waco) on Wednesday, June 11, 2014 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Then, on Thursday, June 12, 2014, Green Cover Seed near Bladen, NE, will sponsor a Soil Health Field Day starting in their field (1 mile east of Bladen) from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Both field days will feature the same speakers, however, each day will offer unique learning opportunities based on the varied field conditions and tour participant questions. Topics will include: Soil Health Comparisons between Conventional Till and No-Till Soils (field demonstrations); Soil Health Indicators; Hands-on No-till Equipment; Soil Ecology and Nutrient Cycling; New Soil Biological Testing; Cover Crops Economics; and Designing Cover Crop Mixtures.

Paul Jasa, University of Nebraska Extension Engineer, will be a key speaker providing updates on no-till equipment and successful adjustments. Other speakers will include: Ray Archuleta, NRCS Conservation Agronomist from North Carolina; Jim Hoorman, Extension Cover Crops Specialist from Ohio State University; Ray Ward, Agronomist with Ward Laboratories; and Keith and Brian Berns, 30-Year No-Till farmers and Green Cover Crops seed suppliers.

There is a registration fee required due to out-of-state speakers travel expenses, noon meals and educational handout materials. To pre-register for these field days, you can either register online at www.greencoverseed.com or call Keith and Brian Berns at 402-469-6784.

On Thursday, June 12 in the evening, I am hosting a UNL wheat plot tour with cooperator Dennis Broz beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the Intersection of 1350 and Road S southwest of Wilber. From the intersection of Highway 41 and Tabor Hall road (1400), go 3 miles south and 1/2 mile west. Soil health is a key issue there also as Ray Ward will be involved in a soil pit demonstration at the site. It will be a long day for Ray because he will travel from Bladen to Wilber for the tour.

I just learned that Steven Knox of the Nebraska Crop Improvement Association will provide \$100, \$75 and \$50 for entries for a new "Guess the High Yield" contest at the Saline County wheat plot tour. No pre-registration is necessary for the tour, just come, and you must be in attendance at the plot tour and be engaged in farming to participate in the contest. For more information, contact UNL Extension in Saline County, phone 402-821-2151.

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