



Indiana Conservation Partnership Soil Health Philosophy

The Indiana Conservation Partnership and our primary customers – Hoosier farmers – are recognized as national leaders in our collaborative efforts to incorporate soil health management systems into conservation planning, farm management and educational activities. Our soil health strategy and priority focus has achieved tremendous success in helping farmers voluntarily address many of the state’s primary resource concerns.

The definition of soil health is the capacity of a soil to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. The four key **Soil Health Principles** which apply to all land uses include:

- Minimize Disturbance
- Maximize Soil Cover
- Maximize Biodiversity
- Provide Continuous Living Roots

To be successful in fully implementing a **Soil Health Management System**, the following objectives must continually be part of every management decision and field operation:

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| Increasing organic matter | Increasing water-holding capacity |
| Increasing aggregate stability | Improving nutrient use efficiency |
| Increasing water infiltration | Enhancing and diversifying soil biology |

Implementing a single management practice may slow the degradation of soil function, but rarely achieves the broad improvements of our resource objectives, so we work with producers to help them implement a “**systems**” approach to improve the health of their soil. This system includes a suite of practices and management methods that when used together results in additional improvements to soil health that can help address Indiana’s primary resource concerns.

The elements of a soil health management system go beyond the minimum standards and specifications of a conservation practice, so when we talk about soil health, we emphasize descriptive adjectives associated with each practice element, such as:

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| Quality No-till/ Strip-till | Diverse Conservation Crop Rotations |
| Adaptive Nutrient Management | Precision Farming Technology |
| Integrated Weed and Pest Management | Prescriptive Conservation Buffers |
| Diverse and Strategic Cover Crop Integration | Integrated Livestock and Manure |

These practices, when combined with a profitable and sustainable soil health system can help producers go beyond sustainability to actually regenerating their soil. But it is important to note that any benefits gained can be quickly lost if this systems approach stops. For that reason, improving soil health requires a commitment to a **never-ending journey**.

For many producers, implementing a soil health management system may require significant changes in their operations. To be fully successful can take time, even years. The ICP supports our customers through ongoing education and financial and technical assistance so that soil health improvement is possible across all agricultural philosophies and becomes the management system of choice.

The Indiana Conservation Partnership is made up of eight Indiana agencies and organizations that share a common goal of promoting conservation. We provide technical, financial and educational assistance to support and implement economically and environmentally compatible land and water stewardship decisions, practices and technologies.