



SOIL CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF CANADA
CONSEIL CANADIEN DE CONSERVATION DES SOLS

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The face and voice of soil conservation in Canada

2015 – International Year of Soils

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared 2015 the International Year of The Soils on December 5, 2014 — the first-ever World Soil Day. By doing so, the UN recognizes that life on Earth is only sustainable when supported by healthy soil. Soils are the foundation of all agricultural production. “95 per cent of our food comes from our soil” — UN.

The UN points out that by 2050, the amount of food producing land available per person will be one quarter of what it was in 1960. Globally, about one-third of the best soil is being lost through expanding urbanization and depleted through mismanagement including erosion, organic matter depletion, compaction, nutrient depletion, salinity and acidification. It emphasizes the importance of soil biota protection as this contributes to soil health, reliable soil productivity, support of the carbon cycle and its contribution to clean water — the lifeblood of soils. The UN points out that the restoration or rehabilitation of soil is never a viable alternative to soil protection and conservation.

This ‘declaration’ brings focus to the Canadian responsibility for soil care and the need to learn from past mistakes. Around the world, history has shown that tillage-based agriculture is not sustainable. It is the primary contributor to soil erosion and the loss of soil biota, organic matter and moisture. Thoughtful and progressive land managers have learned how to sustainably care for soil without sacrificing crop yield. They have learned that soil care pays real dividends as they improve soil health through the

adoption of cover crops, extended crop rotations and practices like no-till. These practices support the development of soil aggregates that are dependent on biota, organic matter and moisture. Aggregates provide strong resistance to wind and water erosion on all landscapes and they improve water infiltration into soil. Further soil protection can be achieved by maintaining secure crop residue, by establishing windbreaks and by controlling concentrated overland water flow.

As we move forward, the cause for the UN ‘soil declaration’ will be increasingly evident to Canadians. Worldwide, population growth, water limitation and soil exhaustion will bring serious pressure for food production on Canadian soil.

Can high production be sustainable without a dramatic reduction in tillage and real attention to soil health? Can agriculture be sustainably intensified on our most productive land so expansion onto ecologically sensitive land is not necessary? Will politicians, policy makers and planners finally stop non-agricultural development on high quality food land?

The SCCC grew from the need to address these and associated issues. The people, businesses and organizations that are members of SCCC believe that soil protection, soil health and the affected water, air, habitat and natural areas are fundamental to sustainable food production and to our existence. We welcome participation by those who share this cause. We particularly welcome the UN’s declaration of the “International Year of the Soils — 2015”.
The legacy and vision continues.

Nominations for the Conservation Hall of Fame may be received from members in good standing until February 20, 2015. For more information contact: Sue Hubbs, 306-695-2231 or info@soilcc.ca

UN Global Soil Partnership

<http://www.fao.org/globalsoilpartnership/iys-2015/en/>

Dirt – The Erosion of Civilizations

Dr. David R. Montgomery;
University of California Press, Berkeley.

Topsoil and Civilization Revised Edition

Vernon Gill Carter and Tom Dale
University of Oklahoma Press.

Reducing Soil Loss

International Innovation
North America, June 2013
www.researchmedia.eu.

Understanding and managing the causes of soil variability

Dr. David A. Lobb,
Journal of Soil and Water Conservation
Nov/Dec 2011 – Vol. 66 No 6.

The Thin Black Line

Gil Gullickson, Successful Farming
April 2014, Agriculture.com.

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