

### **Soil Health Informational Meetings Held in Snyder County**

Farmers are reading and listening about “soil health.” Many groups are promoting soil health. Yet, what is soil health? What makes a soil “healthy?”

Healthy soils are diverse in beneficial microscopic life that aid farmers in fertility and pest control. Healthy soils are more resistant to drought, compaction and erosion.

Experienced farmers are the true experts on soil health. They are the ones who have implemented changes that are improving their soil’s productivity & can relate their experiences to their fellow farmers with experiences in cover cropping, crop residue management, limiting or eliminating tillage, crop rotations, fertility, etc.

The Snyder County Conservation District (SCCD) sponsored three informal meetings geared towards farmers (from the convinced to the skeptical) to share the “What’s,” “Why’s” and “How’s” of soil health. The meetings were held on February 23, 2016, at three different locations throughout the day. Forty-seven (47) participants attended; ranging from experienced farmers, uncertain producers and skeptics, gardeners and landowners, agricultural consultants and agency staff.



Discussions were led by Lisa Blazure, Clinton County Conservation District (CCCD) Agricultural Resource Conservationist (left photo). She has been promoting soil health at various meetings held in Clinton County and throughout the state in the recent years, including a soil health presentation at the 2013 SCCD’s Farmers Winter Meeting. She is also a co-author of a soil health publication produced cooperatively by several organizations (See Note 1).

An exchange of ideas between farmers took place at each session. Topics included cover crop mixes, crop residue management, beneficial bacteria, fungi and other microbial life, and increasing water holding capacity. Attendees received a handout produced by CCCD comparing “healthy” soil from “unhealthy” soil and what they look like. They also received other USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) fact sheets and the soil health publication that was mentioned earlier.

The breakfast session was at Vince’s Pizza Restaurant in Beaver Springs while the lunch session was held at Family Traditions Restaurant in Mt. Pleasant Mills. The evening meal session was in a room located at Hoss’s Steak & Sea House in Shamokin Dam.



All attendees had their meals paid for through an educational grant. (Details are found in Note 2)  
Representatives from SCCD and USDA-NRCS were also present.

Questions or comments about the meetings should be forwarded to [Barry Spangler](#), SCCD Agricultural Conservation Technician, at 570-837-3000, extension 118. Several publications regarding soil health are available at the SCCD (10541 Route 522, Middleburg) as well as the USDA-NRCS Middleburg Field office located at 401 West Market Street (570-837-0007, extension 3). Web savvy individuals can also check out USDA-NRCS's Soil Health website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health>. This website contains many resources, videos and other types of information regarding soil health and help visitors "Unlock the Secrets of the Soil." (USDA-NRCS soil health promotional catch phrase)



*Above Photos: Discussions during the soil health informational meetings.*

*Note 1: Duiker, Sjored W., Joel C. Myers and Lisa C. Blazure. Soil health in field and forage crop production. Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), 2015, Print. Sjored W. Duiker, Ph.D. is an associate professor of Soil Management & Applied Soil Physics for Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences' Department of Plant Science. Joel C. Myers is currently farms practicing no-tilling and following soil health techniques in Centre and Dauphin County, PA, consultant and retired USDA-NRCS State Agronomist. The publication was a combined effort among partners at the USDA-NRCS, Penn State University Extension, Capital Resource Conservation & Development, and Clinton County Conservation District. You can check your nearest USDA-NRCS office or go to PA's USDA-NRCS weblink at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pa/newsroom/factsheets/?cid=nrcseprd330245> for a copy of this publication. SCCD also has a few copies available.*

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