



# SOIL HEALTH

## NACD and America's Conservation Districts

NACD and America's conservation districts are well positioned to help lead one of the most important conservation movements of our time. The Soil Health Movement continues to grow across the country, and conservation districts are playing key roles. NACD's leadership has the potential to open more doors of opportunity. This overview is meant to help NACD leaders, staff, partners, and our members, by answering some basic questions.




### *What is soil health?*

Soil health is: "The continued capacity of the soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals and humans."<sup>1</sup>



### *How are America's conservation districts engaged in the Soil Health Movement?*

Districts are providing technical assistance (planning and installing conservation systems/practices), sponsoring tours and workshops and facilitating discussion groups. Some are providing cost sharing for cover crops, renting no-till drills, offering free soil testing and coordinating aerial seeding. Some districts have added staff to accomplish these tasks.<sup>2</sup>



### *What do districts and state/territory associations need from NACD to assist in their efforts to promote soil health?*

Funding was identified as a major need in a 2014 survey. NACD was also asked to provide training opportunities for staff and supervisors, help develop consistent practice standards, advocate for field-level research about the economics of soil health, share success stories and provide more outreach and education materials. Soil health was identified as being site-specific, providing districts an opportunity to be the local soil health leaders.<sup>3</sup> NACD is now working on these tasks.<sup>4</sup>





## What are key areas of emphasis for NACD and its partners?

NACD participated in the multi-partner Soil Renaissance Strategic Planning Team work in 2014. The partners identified goals in four key work areas: 1. Measurement – To incorporate soil health measures into standardized soil testing that is readily available, affordable and commercially viable; 2. Economics – To quantify the effects of soil health on economic risks and returns; 3. Education – To reawaken the public to the importance of soil health; 4. Research – To convene the research community to advance soil health. The team also identified its vision: Improving soil health is the cornerstone of land use management decisions.

## What are NACD's areas of emphasis?

In addition to the goals above, NACD stresses that soil health practices can benefit all acres. NACD is promoting conservation districts and producers as *local* soil health leaders. NACD is working to engage a team of local champions to promote soil health at the local, state and regional levels. It is developing soil health training templates and suggested Standard Operating Procedures for districts, hosting soil health webinars and making educational and research materials available via its web site and other communications tools, and cooperating on a research project to identify the economic benefits of soil health practices. NACD's goal is to assure that soil health practices and systems are infused across the conservation delivery system. One of NACD's primary advocacy efforts is procuring and safeguarding conservation funding, especially at the federal level



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- 1 According to USDA NRCS
- 2 These activities were identified in a 2014 NACD on-line survey of districts
- 3 The list of needs was identified in the 2014 survey and by NACD focus groups
- 4 A current list of NACD soil health activities can be provided upon request.



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