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(World Soil Day)

Can farmers achieve Win: Win by improving their soil and increasing profitability?

Today (5th December) is World Soil Day – a day to celebrate and raise awareness on the importance of our soils. Soil quality across the world is declining, which is extremely worrying given we need soils to grow our food. Currently, over 33% of our global soils are already degraded and the rate of degradation is accelerating.

Can farmers improve their soil whilst increasing their profitability? This is a question that has been puzzling scientists on the SoilCare research project for the last four years.

SoilCare has identified practices which could transform agriculture's ability to improve soil health. For instance, woodchips made from on-farm waste products, such as hedge cuttings, added to the soil can increase organic matter, soil biodiversity and overall soil quality. Preliminary results from Belgium suggest application of woodchips can hold nitrogen in the soil meaning less is leached into groundwater as pollution, whilst yields are maintained.

Dr. Annemie Elsen from Bodemkundige Dienst van België said "Woodchips appear to have the potential to not only improve soil quality, but also decrease the risk of nutrients like nitrogen leaching out of the soil and provide value to what is essentially a waste product from managing hedges and trees, which could improve farmers' profits".

Another practice being trialled in Portugal is the use of legumes, such as Yellow Lupin and Crimson Clover, as green manures. These plants are grown after one commercial crop and incorporated into the soil shortly before sowing the next crops. Not only do these legumes produce beautiful flowers that attract pollinators, they also add nitrogen to the soil and suppress weeds, which reduces the need to buy and apply expensive fertilisers and herbicides.



Project co-ordinator Dr Hessel based at Wageningen Environmental Research said;

“By working closely with farmers and policy-makers throughout the project, it is hoped that the promising profitable practices identified by the end of the project will be quickly adopted by the farming community, leading ultimately to better soil health and all the accompanying benefits, such as improved food, flood protection and carbon storage.”

Ends:

CTA

1 - For more details on the project see <http://www.soilcare-project.eu>

2 - For a media pack, including photographs, please contact Jane Mills, *Countryside and Community Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham, UK*
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3 – This project is supported by the EU H2020 programme.

4 – [Over 33% of the Earth’s soil are already degraded and over 90% could become degraded by 2050. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#)

SoilCare Boiler Plate

The aim of the EU-funded SoilCare project is to identify, evaluate and promote promising soil-improving cropping systems and agronomic techniques that increase both the profitability and sustainability of agriculture in Europe. This project has received funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 Programme.

Further information:

The project, funded by the EU Horizon2020 research programme, brings together scientists from 16 countries across Europe to work on trials to identify farming practices that could both improve the soil and increase profitability.