



**National
Agricultural
Land
Network**

A PROJECT OF
AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

Soil Health Stewards

Promoting Soil Health on Protected Agricultural Lands

Healthy soils are the foundation of productive farmland and farm viability. Healthy soils can improve both on-farm productivity and environmental health by preventing the loss of soil and nutrients to our waterways, protecting water quality and water quantity, and restoring soil biology and function. They are also critical to enabling farms and ranches to sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and be more resilient to increasingly intense and erratic weather conditions.

AFT's *Soil Health Stewards* Program is an ambitious national effort to engage and support agricultural land protection practitioners in promoting soil health practices with the farmers, ranchers, and others who own and manage permanently protected agricultural land—and on

the agricultural land their agency or organization itself owns.

The program's focus is on the more than 6 million acres of permanently protected farms and ranches across the United States, recognizing the lasting impact that soil health improvements on this land will provide. The program seeks to serve the needs of land trusts and public Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) programs, both those already engaged in this work and those just starting out, to enable them to grow their efforts to support and incentivize producers and landowners of protected land to address soil health.

TRAINING AGRICULTURAL LAND PROTECTION PRACTITIONERS

Launched in 2021, this program provides unique learning opportunities and support for staff of land conservation organizations and public PACE programs across the nation. In 2022, AFT will offer two multi-day virtual training sessions for staff from entities that hold agricultural conservation easements purchased in part through the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). These training opportunities will be combined with small grants to participating entities to assist them in their outreach and engagement efforts. Participating staff

“ I will admit I was initially skeptical of this training really being able to fill 2½ days' worth of time, but you really did a great job. Great speakers and great conversation. I learned a lot, and thought I knew quite a bit about soil health to begin with. ”

— SOIL HEALTH STEWARD PARTICIPANT

will have an opportunity to learn about the economic and environmental benefits of soil health practices while building skills to support farmers, ranchers, and landowners in adopting these practices. Additional trainings will be offered in 2023.

When completed, participants will be able to:

- Communicate effectively about the benefits of healthy soil and the conservation practices that enhance soil health.
- Understand basic challenges farmers experience with soil health practice adoption.
- Connect interested farmers with technical advisors, cost-share programs, and other resources to help them successfully implement soil health practices.

“ I felt the way each session/discussion was presented met us where we were at which was helpful. Didn't assume we were experts, but also weren't born yesterday. Asking about our experiences and hearing others experiences on the topic was helpful. ”

— SOIL HEALTH STEWARD PARTICIPANT

- Understand options and alternatives for addressing environmental resource concerns and promoting soil health practices through agricultural conservation easement language and other agreements and contracts.

Specific support and resources will include:

- A formal training program with a curriculum developed in collaboration with a national advisory committee composed of scientists and conservation professionals with direct experience working with farmers, ranchers, and landowners to promote soil health.
- Ongoing technical support from the National Agricultural Land Network and AFT's soil health team, led by Dr. Bianca Moebius-Clune, former founding Director of USDA-NRCS' Soil Health Division.
- A toolkit of resources land protection practitioners can use to educate, engage, and evaluate soil health practice implementation on protected agricultural land.

“ All of your AFT staff have been great at facilitating and keeping the conversation moving and that has made a great difference and made it just as valuable as being in person! Thank you for this great mix of content. It's felt like a comprehensive, meaningful training! ”

— SOIL HEALTH STEWARD PARTICIPANT

“ The training truly was excellent, and the facilitators were outstanding. I learned far more than I imagined and am eager to develop and implement our soil health plan. ”

— SOIL HEALTH STEWARD PARTICIPANT

- Access to compelling, easy-to-read case studies featuring already “soil health successful farmers” that document the impacts improved soil health can have on farm economics, water, and climate.
- Small grants to enable practitioners to attend trainings and engage producers and landowners.
- Opportunities to be part of a supportive community of practitioners that is broadening efforts to increase soil health practice adoption across the country.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The *Soil Health Stewards* program is being offered through AFT's National Agricultural Land Network (NALN) to engage and attract robust participation from agricultural land protection practitioners across the nation. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service is generously providing financial support for the program.

The NALN is a national information and peer learning network focused on agricultural land retention and protection. The NALN currently hosts over 700 members from public



Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement programs, private land trusts, and state and county government or quasi-governmental agencies engaged in agriculture, conservation, and/or land use planning. Farm and conservation organizations, land trust coalitions, trade associations, and agricultural service providers may also be members. Membership is free, and members can join as individuals or as an organization.

More information about the NALN can be found at farmland.org/NALN.

NALN CONTACTS

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