



## **ADVANCED SOIL HEALTH TRAINING: GUIDELINES**

### **What is AFT's Advanced Soil Health Training program?**

American Farmland Trust's **Advanced Soil Health Training** (ASHT) program is designed for corn, soybean, wheat, cotton, and dairy farmers and farm advisors who share an interest in improving soil health. We are excited to bring you the best in agricultural education through our expert trainers, and to give you the tools both to grow your own learning and to share knowledge and inspire change within your networks. This program is funded by the USDA through the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities (PCSC) program, as part of a [grant led by Truterra](#). AFT is partnering on the project to train expert soil health advisors who will share their expertise with their clients, communities, and the next generation of farmers.

Through this in-person training, you will have direct access to high-level trainers who can answer your questions, as well as the opportunity to build relationships over a year with a cohort of 30-35 participants, facilitators, and speakers who have unique expertise and experiences with soil health and agriculture.

This ASHT will combine classroom discussion and hands-on training to prepare participants for real-world management challenges and next-level strategies for soil health transitions. Then, participants will experience, apply, and test their knowledge through site visits to distinguished farmers who will share their practical insights. Participants will also engage with their cohort between course sessions. Additionally, participants will be coached through the development of a Soil Health Impact Plan through which they will be empowered to increase soil health systems adoption on farms in their area, and will have access to supplemental online resources and networking tools. Our trainers will also be sharing their experience building relationships among their trainee cohorts that last long after the training.

In order to make the training relevant to your production systems, AFT will be offering the program in the Midwest, New York, Mid Atlantic, Southeast, and New England over the next three years. Each training program will consist of four two-day in-person training sessions.

**Financial stipends are available to successful applicants.** You can apply [at this link](#), and keep reading for more information.

### **Which topics will the training cover?**

Our ASHT program will cover the following modules in the classroom and in the field:

- Intro to Soil Health and Soil Function
- Soil Health Management Principles
- Soil Biology and Habitat
- Soil Health Indicators
- Strategizing and Implementing Soil Health Management Systems
- Adapting Nutrient and Pest Management in a Soil Health Management System
- Cover Crop Management
- No-till and Strip-till Management
- Social and Economic Considerations
- Utilizing Prescribed Grazing on Cropland for Soil Health
- Benefits and Resources for Protecting Farmland through Conservation Easements
- Effective Communication to Build Peer-to-Peer Networks
- Writing a Soil Health Implementation Plan to Create and Support Peer-to-Peer Networks and support others' transitions to Soil Health Management Systems
- Additional content and resources will be made available virtually, such as resources on biochar and other practices at the leading edge, working effectively with historically underserved producers, and more.

### **What skills will I develop?**

- How to understand, plan, implement, and troubleshoot soil health management practices that are logical and practical in your region.
- How to communicate effectively about the benefits of healthy soils and types of conservation practices that enhance soil health and improve soil function and resilience.
- How to advise interested producers on accessing financial assistance and other resources to help them adopt soil health practices and management systems successfully.
- How to develop and implement an effective Soil Health Impact Plan for catalyzing adoption in your community, and an active network of participants.
- How to connect interested producers with each other in peer-to-peer networks to share the adoption journey's challenges and solutions.
- How to explain options and programs for climate-smart carbon benefits available through Truterra, AFT and partners, and enroll producers in the Climate SMART project

### **Why is mentorship so key to this program?**

Each farm and geography is unique. There is a need to grow the number of local, trusted farmer advisors who can work with farmers to adapt their practices for changing circumstances, and who can build and maintain networks for farmers to share their challenges and solutions. The most effective advisors are often fellow farmers who have been successful in their own adoption of soil health management practices.

### **What funding is provided?**

For selected participants (all farmers, and some ag service providers) there is no fee for the training! AFT will also provide travel stipends for selected participants taking part in the full course (\$4,000, or \$1000/session). Selected participants who successfully develop, submit, and start to report on their soil health implementation plan will receive an additional \$1,000 stipend at the completion of the training. After the training, selected participants will have the opportunity to become active soil health advisors with our project, who will be compensated for their time in implementing their plans, developing their farmer-mentor network, enrolling farmers in project opportunities, providing technical assistance to implement soil health management systems, and sharing with us about the impact your network is having.

### **Where and when will the training courses happen?**

The program will consist of four (4) two (2)-day, in-person sessions over 12-18 months, depending on which cohort you join. There will be 30 participant seats for each course. There will be learning opportunities in a classroom setting, on demonstration farms, and through the development of a Soil Health Impact Plan, which will define steps to build a successful network. The opportunity to become an active soil health advisor will start during the course, and continue through project end in early 2028.

There will be eight programs starting in 2024 and 2025, with the first four based in the Midwest, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic and New York, and a New England training program starting in 2025.

**The first session of the Midwest program will be held on July 23-24 in West Lafayette, Indiana.** The second session will be in August 2024, the third in September 2024, and the fourth and final session in March of 2025. (We will continue updating the online application and our website at [farmland.org/asht](http://farmland.org/asht) with the latest dates of each training in the Midwest and other regions.) Applications open on 4/15 for the **Southeast training, and the first session will be held on July 30-31 in Raleigh, North Carolina.**

Although trainings for the other regions are not open yet, you are welcome to fill out the application form now, or you fill out [this interest form](#), and we can get back to you when applications open for training in your area.

**What are the requirements for participation?**

Competitive applicants will have at least baseline experience implementing conservation practices, knowledge and experience with farming practices and concepts, experience providing technical assistance to producers, and excellent communication skills. Competitive applicants will also actively seek to include or even focus on historically [underserved producers](#) (socially disadvantaged, limited resource, veteran, and beginner farmers per NRCS) in their work. Successful participants will become active soil health advisors and build networks of farmers who will implement new conservation practices and report on impact for the project. Participants will develop and start to implement a Soil Health Impact Plan as part of the training program. These plans will detail how they will develop their advisory network.

**What are the benefits and responsibilities of participation?**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
Increase knowledge of adaptive, region-specific soil health practices and systems implementation, common management solutions, and assessment of soil health and ecosystem services	Attend and participate in all in-person sessions of the Advanced Soil Health Training
Establish relationships and share insights with other trusted soil health advisors and practitioners from your region and across the country	Develop and implement a Soil Health Impact Plan - take the training’s learnings back to catalyze adoption in your community
Become recognized as a soil health and climate smart leader in your community	Develop a farmer-to-farmer learning network in your community
Receive stipends to cover travel expenses and your efforts to plan out your impact for soil health adoption in your community, and compensation for becoming an active soil health advisor	Work with AFT to enroll 1+ farmers in the project, provide technical assistance and guidance for their implementation of NRCS practices, ensuring inclusion of and/or focus on providing access to historically underserved producers. Support farmers’ participation in various government and private financial assistance programs
Participate in project network and access financial and technical resources for new innovations and impact evaluation	Provide timely quarterly updates to meet project reporting requirements to help AFT meet its target of 400 farmers enrolled and adopting practices, including 160 historically underserved farmers, and updates on broader engagement of larger numbers of producers in exploring options for climate smart soil health promoting approaches.
Opportunities to work with, learn from, and influence project partners	Work effectively to engage historically underserved producers, participate in surveys

	to help improve approaches to scaling up impact
Build your professional network to benefit your farm, business, and vision	Engage with network and resources to maintain and improve knowledge, skill, and expertise in soil health

**What else do I need to know before I apply?**

- Funding is contingent on the awardee completing and accepting the terms of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with American Farmland Trust.
- A W-9 is required to receive funds and must be submitted along with the MOA.
- If the awardee does not provide the required documents within 14 days of notification of acceptance, AFT may choose to award funds to another applicant.
- This is a competitive application process. Priority will be given to applicants on the basis of the potential impact of the developed network and demonstrated interest in advancing soil health, advancing access for historically underserved producers, and serving as an advisor, as expressed in the application narrative.
- This document will be updated as more details are available about programs dates, locations, and programmatic details and requirements.

**I'm ready! Where can I find the application?**

To apply, please fill out the online application [at this link](#). The application should take about 30 minutes to complete. It includes several short answer questions to allow you to provide details about your experience and skills that make you an excellent candidate for the program. From the initial pool of applicants, we will select up to 40 for further review, which may include a phone interview and reference check. There will be 30 seats available for each regional program.

**Who can I contact if I have more questions?**

For National Program questions: Alex Duprey, AFT Climate and Soil Health Coordinator, [aduprey@farmland.org](mailto:aduprey@farmland.org), 202-777-3792

For the Midwest program: Casey Kula, AFT Midwest Soil Health Specialist, [ckula@farmland.org](mailto:ckula@farmland.org), 414-285-3607

For the Southeast program: Courtney Owens, AFT Southeast Regional Director, [cowens@farmland.org](mailto:cowens@farmland.org), 859-242-7153

For the New York program: Aaron Ristow, AFT New York Senior Agriculture Specialist, [aristow@farmland.org](mailto:aristow@farmland.org), 315-748-5029

For the Mid-Atlantic program: Amanda Cather, AFT Mid-Atlantic Program Manager, [acather@farmland.org](mailto:acather@farmland.org), 202-378-1244

For the New England program: Alissa White, New England Deputy Director, [awhite@farmland.org](mailto:awhite@farmland.org)