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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
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New USDA Program Focuses on Improving Soil Health

BOISE, ID – February 7, 2013 – The [Natural Resources Conservation Service](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) is rolling out a new initiative that encourages improving soil health. In Idaho, the initiative focuses on reducing wind and water erosion issues by increasing soil health. Producers interested in implementing conservation practices emphasizing soil health may apply for technical and financial assistance by March 15, 2013 for fiscal year 2013 funding.

“The Soil Health Initiative promotes improving the soil through soil health management systems,” said Marlon Winger, State Agronomist. “A system combines several different types of tactics to improve soil health.”

Winger says the initiative highlights four basic principles to improve soil health:

1. Keep the soil covered as much as possible
2. Disturb the soil as little as possible
3. Keep plants growing throughout the year to feed soil organisms
4. Diversify as much as possible using crop rotation and cover crops

NRCS developed the Soil Health Initiative to help farmers accomplish practices that will support these principles. “Improved soils can lower energy costs by reducing tillage needs, decrease wind and water erosion, improve plant health, decrease fertilizer requirements, and use water more effectively reducing runoff,” Winger said.

“Increasing organic material in the soil is one way to improve the habitat for soil microorganisms,” said Winger. “The increased biodiversity in healthy soils supports plant growth and protects air and water quality.” Practices that add organic material to the soil will increase the microorganism activity in the soil. Examples are cover crops, no-till, and mulch till.

Applications received by March 15th will be evaluated and ranked for approval based on available fiscal year 2013 funds.

For more information on this initiative or soil health, stop by your local USDA service center or visit NRCS online at <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>. Landowners new to USDA programs are encouraged to contact their local NRCS field office as soon as possible to ensure they have the time needed to make informed decisions and complete the application process.

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