OKLAHOMA SOIL HEALTH CHAMPIONS EXPLORE SOCIAL MEDIA

Oklahoma Soil Health Champions and members of the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership participated in a social media workshop April 18 and 19 hosted by the Noble Foundation. Participants learned not only how to use Facebook to promote soil health, but also about how different generations use technology and social media. Some of the champions were already active on Facebook but for others this was a complete learning experience.

Oklahoma soil health champions, working with NRCS, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Employees Association created a Facebook page dedicated specifically the soil health in Oklahoma and the work of the champions. The champions have committed to post their soil health activities to the Facebook page. Posts will include field days, presentations, tours and even daily happenings on their own farms and ranches. They are most excited about the opportunity to answer soil health questions and help others join the soil health movement in Oklahoma.

Amy Hays from the Noble Foundation led the workshop. Participants learned a lot about what makes a good post on Facebook and how to post a photo or comment, and how to like and share other posts. They also learned the importance of each status and how it helps spread your message across Facebook. Several of the more novice Facebook users made their first Facebook post while at the workshop.

Workshop participants included Oklahoma Soil Health Champions Rick and Diane Jeans, Allan and Tina Mindeman, Jimmy and Ginger Emmons and Scotty and Jo Herriman. NRCS was represented by State Conservationist Gary O’Neal and Public Affairs Specialist Robert Hathorne. Trey and Joanne Lam with Oklahoma Conservation Commission also participated in the workshop along with Keith and Coleta Bratton with the Dewey County Conservation District and NACD South Central Region Representative Tamara Daniel. Other Noble Foundation staff that assisted Hays with the workshop included Chad Ellis and Jim Johnson.

Be sure to like and share the Oklahoma Soil Health Facebook page the next time you are on Facebook. They would love to answer questions and welcome feedback.

Front row (left to right): Alan Mindeman, Robert Hathorne, Joann Lam, Rick Jeans, Diane Jeans, Keith Bratton, Coleta Bratton, Jo Herriman, Scotty Herriman

Back row: Tina Mindeman, Gary O’Neil, Trey Lam, Tamara Daniel, Jim Johnson, Jimmy Emmons, Ginger Emmons
Case Study Focused on Fertilizer Reduction

Background: Ron Snyder, Soil Health Champion from Ohio, has been working with Woods End Labs to reduce the amount of fertilizer he uses on his farm. As a test, Snyder used cover crops in a field where neither phosphorus or potassium were applied for four years. The results were impressive; Snyder says his soil test numbers in the test field are holding or going up in value. This year, he is planning to use Solvita® tests to gauge the impact of reducing the use of nitrogen fertilizer. Below is the information from Solvita, printed with their permission.

“Getting a 4 or 5 on a Solvita test is the key indicator where I will be comfortable telling people that they can start cutting back.”

Ron Snyder, farmer
Wood County, OH
Winner of the Ohio DNR 2015 Conservation Farm Family Awards

The Challenge
Ron Snyder described his farm soil as a brick, literally! He had been tilling crop residues into his clay soils and after a summer of baking in the sun, he found his crop growth to be poor for the past five years.

The Discovery
Ron decided to try cover cropping his soils to improve soil structure, based upon a meeting five years ago with Gabe Brown. He planted winter rye for three years to keep a living root growing in his soil. He decided that he needed to monitor changes in his soil’s fertility and structure and used Solvita carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) respiration as the measure.

Why Ron Chose Solvita Soil Testing
Ron worked with Abby Wensink of the Wood County Soil and Water Conservation District to pull some samples and get his Solvita respiration test results. Armed with his data, including soil temperature and growing season days, he consulted the Solvita Field Test CO$_2$ Calculator and learned how much potential mineralizable nitrogen his soil could produce.

Results
Ron learned that his improved soils and soil biology could produce an estimated 102 pounds of nitrogen a year. He calculated that this represents a savings of over $49 per acre in nitrogen alone.

Are you using soil health practices and recording the results? Send your story to Beth Mason at beth-mason@nacdnet.org to have it featured by the NACD Soil Health Champions Network.
Facebook Pictures

These pictures come straight from our Facebook Group, “NACD Soil Health Champions.” Don’t forget to sign-up and share your pictures, videos, articles, and knowledge!

“Conventional corn planted into a seven species cover crop. Only 75 units of nitrogen needed for a 160bu corn crop.” ~ Russell Hedrick, North Carolina

“Who says paraquat (gramoxone) doesn't work on grass?? This is a soybean field that had a good cover of Italian rye. We use 40 ounces of 3-pound paraquat with 4 ounces of metribuzen to get a great kill. The only thing survived is a few marestail—they’re tough. They burned to the ground then came back. This field has plenty of moisture from recent rains. We have found that covers this time of the year need to be terminated a week or two before planting so they won’t deplete moisture in the soil.” ~ Carl Coleman (“Farmer Carl”), South Carolina

“This is one of our NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) fields that has been in covers for three years. We are looking at the Haney test to see how much nitrogen we can reduce when using covers. There are a lot of critters under that residue.” ~ Carl Coleman (“Farmer Carl”), South Carolina
Educational Opportunities for the Network

Water Quality Teleconference

NACD hosted an educational conference call on June 14 with special guest speaker, Dr. Joe Magner from the University of Minnesota. Dr. Magner’s presentation was entitled “The Treatment Train: Managing Ag-land Runoff” and spoke of the various combinations of conservation practices that assist in better water quality in the agricultural landscape.

If you have a speaker or topic you would like NACD to host on a teleconference, please be sure to contact Beth Mason at beth-mason@nacdnet.org or call 317-946-4463.

NACD Conservation Leadership Forum and Tour

Be sure to join NACD and the Soil Health Champions Network in Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 15—19 for learning and networking opportunities at this summer’s NACD Conservation Leadership Forum and Tour. All NACD Soil Health Champions will receive complimentary registration and an invitation to a special “Meet and Greet” with coffee on Saturday, July 16, from 7:00 am - 8:00 am (just prior to the NACD board meeting). At 9:00 am Dr. Joe Magner, a professor at the University of Minnesota, will be sharing details on the latest research he’s conducting in southern Minnesota.

For a full list of training sessions and tour stops, please be sure to download a copy of the agenda here.

Drones: Taking Farming to the Next Level

Earlier this month in the Resource, NACD highlighted Soil Health Champion Donavon Taves and his use of cutting-edge technology.

Taves first started using a six-rotor drone - called a hexacopter, programmed and fitted with a camera - to monitor his irrigation system for black bear damage on a daily basis. Now Taves flies drones over his fields in Louisiana as a way to monitor the health of his crops. The drone takes photos while in flight and Taves later uploads those photos to an application that analyzes them and makes nutrient prescriptions.

Taves also uses a ground rover drone to scout rows of corn and spray for weeds. Using virtual reality goggles, he can see his fields as if he were looking out of the ground rover's windshield.

To learn more about Taves and his operation, be sure to check out his profile on the NACD Soil Health Champions site. NACD supports the use of drones on private working lands to enhance conservation delivery. Check out the newest eResource for more information on the Federal Aviation Administration's final small drone rule.
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NACD has a great team working on your behalf to build the Soil Health Champions Network. Please feel free to contact any of the staff members below with questions or suggestions.

NACD Field Representatives (check out the region map at www.nacdnet.org/about/districts/directory)
Northeast Region—Beth Mason, Indiana, beth-mason@nacdnet.org, 317-946-4463 (temporary)
Southeast Region—Phylis Vandevere, Mississippi, phylis-vandevere@nacdnet.org, 601-941-8251
North Central Region—Beth Mason, Indiana, beth-mason@nacdnet.org, 317-946-4463
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Upcoming Events
Send us your upcoming national or regional events

2016
July 14: Northern Seed Trade Association, St. Paul, Minn.
July 15 - 18: NACD Conservation Leadership Forum and Tour, Minneapolis, Minn.
July 27 - 29: Soil Health Institute Meeting, Louisville, Ky.

2017
Jan. 10 - 13: National No-Till Conference, St. Louis, Mo.

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