

Conserving Soil Protects Our Climate

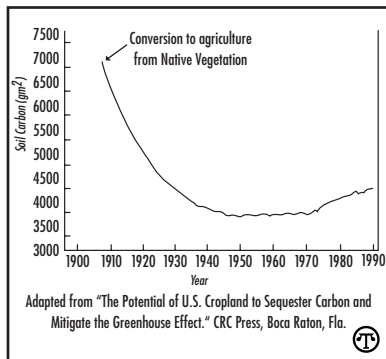
(NAPSA)—Experts are suggesting we use an old tool—soil conservation—to fix a new problem—global climate change. Scientists generally agree that increasing amounts of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere will lead to global warming. The threat of temperatures 5 to 10 degrees higher and the possibility of more severe storms, floods and drought have intensified efforts to reduce the amount of carbon released into the earth's atmosphere.

Soil conservation could be one solution. When farmers, ranchers, and foresters practice good soil conservation, they are doing more than controlling erosion; they are helping clear the air of carbon dioxide.

Scientists estimate that about half the carbon originally stored in prairie soils was lost when those prairies were converted to agriculture. Most of that carbon was released into the air as carbon dioxide—a greenhouse gas. Since the 1970s, however, better soil conservation practices have begun to rebuild the soil and its carbon reserves.

Common soil conservation practices, such as conservation tillage, cover crops, and crop rotations take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and store it as soil organic matter. Some landowners who have used these and other practices have doubled the amount of carbon stored in their soil.

That is not enough carbon storage to stop the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, but it can help slow the process. Storing carbon in the nation's cropland could be enough to offset all of the emissions of greenhouse



Since the 1970s, soil conservation has been putting carbon back into the soil.

gases from agricultural activities in the U.S.

Soil conservation could buy valuable time to address the more difficult challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, cars, industry, and a multitude of other sources. In addition, soil conservation reduces soil erosion, cleans up our lakes, rivers and streams, conserves shrinking supplies of freshwater, and improves fish and wildlife habitat.

Some private organizations and companies are trying to find ways to pay farmers to store carbon and lend a hand to the global fight against climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions. Government programs are helping too. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs provide the science-based advice and financial incentives landowners need to conserve soil, store carbon, and enhance the environment.

To learn more about soil conservation and the environment, visit www.swcs.org.