

NEWS RELEASE

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FFAR Awards \$9.4 Million to Spur Next Leap in Agriculture: Improved Soil Health to Optimize Economic and Environmental Results for U.S. Farmers

Soil Health Institute, Soil Health Partnership and The Nature Conservancy to Collaborate on Research, Benefiting Environment, Farmers and Communities

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - The Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, a nonprofit established through bipartisan support in the 2014 Farm Bill, today announced a \$9.4 million grant to the Soil Health Institute, the Soil Health Partnership and The Nature Conservancy to improve soil health and, ultimately, support positive economic and environmental outcomes for American farmers. The grant will be matched by General Mills, Jeremy and Hannelore Grantham Environmental Trust, Midwest Row Crop Collaborative, Monsanto, Nestlé Purina PetCare Company, The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, Walmart Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and individual donors for a total investment of nearly \$20 million.

The goal of this project is to support collaborative research and education that accelerates adoption and benefits of soil health management systems nationally. Soil health is a critical component of a productive and sustainable agricultural system. Farming practices that improve soil health can increase profitability while protecting natural resources like air and water for communities.

However, there is no standardized measurement for soil health in the United States; instead, different sets of measurements and methods can conflict and confuse farmers and field conservationists. Furthermore, many landowners of rented farmland are not aware of the benefits soil health improvements can deliver. This project will help the industry adopt standardized measurements to evaluate and improve soil health while expanding education and tools for local farmers, agronomists, and landowners.

"If we can unlock the potential of healthy soil, we can move closer to a sustainable agricultural system for everyone," said Sally Rockey, Ph.D., executive director of FFAR. "The Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research is pleased to harness the power of collaboration by supporting three leading organizations in this space for the long-term benefit of our nation's farmers and food system."

Collaborators will take an integrated, three-pronged approach. The Soil Health Institute will develop and test soil health measurements; the Soil Health Partnership will implement and evaluate soil health promoting practices on working farms; and The Nature Conservancy will work with non-operator landowners to encourage use of science-based soil health practices. The partners believe significant engagement with farmers and landowners will catalyze greater adoption of soil health promoting practices that benefit productivity, farmer livelihoods, and the environment.

“The needs for advancing soil health are far greater than any single organization can provide – public or private,” said Wayne Honeycutt, President and CEO of the Soil Health Institute. “That’s why this project is so important. It leverages public funds authorized by Congress through the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research with resources provided by other foundations and corporations through the combined capacities of the Soil Health Institute, Soil Health Partnership, and The Nature Conservancy. This kind of partnership creates a way to advance soil health for the benefit of all who need safe, high-quality products from agriculture, natural resources to sustain human and all other life, thriving communities, and a strong economy. In other words, it benefits *everyone*.”

“American agriculture has made extraordinary strides in technology and productivity in this century, but the next frontier is in soil health,” said Nick Goeser, director of the Soil Health Partnership. “This grant represents one of the largest investments ever made in soil health, one of the best tools we have to optimize productivity while minimizing environmental impact. It will allow us to expand our program to include more farmers who want to benefit from our body of work analyzing how practices like growing cover crops, reducing tillage and using advanced nutrient management can help family farms survive and thrive.”

“With a shared commitment to science and the improved soil health and productivity of America’s farmlands, we are pleased to be part of this collaboration,” said Larry Clemens, director of The Nature Conservancy’s North America Agriculture Program. “This grant awarded by the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research and matched by generous contributors will not only advance the science of soil health, but we expect to see an increase in the adoption of on-field soil health practices. By engaging farmers and the landowners they rent from, we can help increase farm profitability and protect water and land resources.”

FFAR is supporting this collaborative project through its Healthy Soils, Thriving Farms Challenge Area, which aims to increase soil health by building knowledge, fueling innovation, and enabling adoption of existing or novel practices that improve soil health.

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About the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research

The Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization established by bipartisan congressional support in the 2014 Farm Bill, builds unique partnerships to support innovative and actionable science addressing today's food and agriculture challenges. FFAR leverages public and private resources to increase the scientific and technological research, innovation, and partnerships critical to enhancing sustainable production of nutritious food for a growing global population. The FFAR Board of Directors is chaired by Mississippi State University President Mark Keenum and includes ex officio representation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and National Science Foundation. Learn more: foundationfar.org.

About the Soil Health Institute

The Soil Health Institute's (www.soilhealthinstitute.org) mission is to safeguard and enhance the vitality and productivity of soil through scientific research and advancement. An evolution of the Soil Renaissance, an initiative established in 2013 by the Noble Foundation and Farm Foundation to advance soil health and make it the cornerstone of land use management decisions, the Soil Health Institute serves as the primary resource for soil health information.

About the Soil Health Partnership

The Soil Health Partnership is a farmer-led initiative that fosters transformation in agriculture through improved soil health, benefiting both farmer profitability and the environment. With more than 100 working farms enrolled in 12 states the SHP tests, measures and advances progressive farm management practices that will enhance sustainability and farm economics for generations to come. SHP brings together diverse partners to work towards common goals. At least a ten-year scientific program administered by the National Corn Growers Association, the SHP's vision is driven by initial and continuing funding and guidance from NCGA, Monsanto, the Walton Family Foundation, the Midwest Row Crop Collaborative, General Mills and USDA, with technical support from The Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defense Fund. For more, visit soilhealthpartnership.org.

About The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in 72 countries, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org or follow [@nature_press](https://twitter.com/nature_press) on Twitter.