Soil Health

Why is the health of soil important?

Soil conservation is the only way to ensure we will have the land we need to live and grow healthy crops on for generations to come. Organic agriculture is comprised of several management strategies that prevent soil from being eroded from the earth's surface or becoming chemically altered by overuse and other chemical contamination.

Why is 'organic agriculture' better for the soil?

Organic agriculture builds up the beneficial nutrients in the soil providing a vital foundation that results in healthy crops. Organic farming also enhances soil fertility and biodiversity, according to findings from a 21-year field trial initiated by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in Switzerland. It began in 1978 in Therwil, Switzerland, and compared the consequences of organic, biodynamic, and conventional farming systems in a randomized plot trial. Results from the study showed that:

- Fertilization in organic systems has a positive effect on the content of organic matter and helps to avoid soil acidification.
- Organic soil management improves soil structure by adding organic matter through cover cropping and adding compost, which increases biological activity in the soil, thus reducing the risk of erosion.
- Organic management promotes the development of earthworms and millions of microscopic life forms in the soil above ground, thus improving the growth conditions of the crop.
- A balanced ecosystem develops more abundant predators to help control harmful insects and diseases.
- Organic crops benefit from improved soil structure and biological complexity and are better able to colonize the soil, utilizing the complex healthy ecosystem to accumulate nutrients and plant defenses.
- Organic soil accommodates a greater variety of plants, animals and microorganisms.

Source: FiBL Dossier: Organic farming enhances soil fertility and biodiversity, August 2000.