

Team Grains

Wisconsin soil quality outreach



Situation

Maintaining and enhancing soil quality is vital to the long-term profitability and productivity of Wisconsin agriculture and to the quality of the environment. Inappropriate soil management leads to soil erosion, lack of rotational diversity and a growing dependence on purchased inputs. Changes in Wisconsin agriculture such as increasing use of corn silage, more acres in a corn-soybean rotation, and using bigger equipment can also reduce soil quality. Focused educational efforts can help farmers improve management practices in tillage, residue management, and using cover crops to maintain and improve soil quality.

Response

The Team Grains soil management work group and other members of the Wisconsin Soil Quality Team conducted soil quality field days in Platteville, Baraboo, Ashland and Catawba. In addition, county agents conducted field days in

Sauk/Columbia, Juneau, Winnebago and Grant Counties, using information and ideas advanced by the Soil Quality Team. Soil quality presentations were also conducted at the Arlington Agronomy Field Day. Farmers were the intended primary audience, but other agricultural professionals also attended.

Field days included a classroom session covering basic soil ecology, organic matter dynamics, soil quality parameters, and tillage management plus a field session. The field sessions allowed participants to visit soil pits where they could see illustrations of soil quality concepts such as water infiltration, rooting patterns, structure development, aggregate stability, earthworm activity, and soil respiration.

The 2008 field days included new teaching partners, including colleagues from the Nutrient and Pest Management staff, UW-

Pioneer Farm, UW-Platteville, soil scientists from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and staff from Pri-Ru-Ta Resource Conservation and Development Area and the West Wisconsin Land Trust.

Outcomes

- In 2008, 283 people attended field days. About one-half of participants were farmers and one-third were government agency professionals.
- Evaluation surveys of previous years' field days show that participants increase their understanding of the nine key points presented at the field days and cite numerous examples of how they would be able to use the information they learned.

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