



Team Grains

## Wisconsin soil quality outreach

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 Fond du Lac, Chippewa, Adams and Columbia Counties. 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 Adams County session dealt with the unique environment of the central sands area and nematodes in vegetable production systems. 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.

In addition to the field days, team member Dick Wolkowski developed a slide show on soil quality that he presented at the 2005 Soil and Water Management meetings.

### Outcome

Evaluations of the field days showed that farmers who attended planned to make a variety of soil management changes as a result of what they learned. Some of the changes they planned to make included reducing tillage; incorporating forage crops, small grains, and cover crops into rotations; reducing traffic on wet fields; making better use of organic matter in soil management; and performing some of the soil quality assessments they learned at the field days.

In 2005, 139 people attended field days. About one-third of participants were farmers.

In addition to the field days, about 500 people also learned about soil quality at the Soil and Water meetings.

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May 2006+