



GUIDE TO: Comprehensive Soil Health Management Plan

Looking back at Year 1, Planning for Year 2

About this Document

The Comprehensive Soil Health Management Plan helps focus on a systems approach to soil health when making management decisions. This document is a guide to help you complete the Plan and explains the intent behind each question. Your FARMS Mentors and Technical Assistants are also available to help you in this task.

This plan will be submitted to FARMS Admin by participating producers. A member of the FARMS administration or technical team will verify practices for payment. We will use this plan to pay you for completing your practices. If you experience an event that causes you to need to change practices, you will update your CSHMP and resubmit to the FARMS Administration office. **Incentive payments will be verified off of the most recent CSHMP on file.**

You must address all four soil health principles in your plan: minimize disturbance, maximize soil cover, maximize biodiversity, and maximize living roots. Adding livestock is an optional 5th principle. Keep in mind some practices can address more than one principle, and it can be a combination of existing and new practices that satisfy this requirement.

Practices eligible for payment must be new practices that you have not received NRCS payments for in the past.

Getting Started

Have you done the Soil Evaluation Tool yet in the field? If not, go back and do that one first. It helps you evaluate the health of your field, recognize priority indicators, and identify possible corrective actions. From there, the CSHMP helps you develop a plan to address those challenges.

Looking back at Year 1:

When we assess the outcomes of our previous decisions measured against the goal, we can more easily make any adjustments that are needed, or change course entirely.

We mention success quite a bit, but reality is sometimes we are not successful. Just like this year, when rain was lacking and wind blew away the stubble that did manage to grow, our best efforts sometimes are smashed by Mother Nature. We do not understand all the interactions in the ecosystem. It has taken decades to destroy the soil to the current state. FARMS-ers are doing what others are not willing to try; this is a great service to the soil and others in regenerative ag! The best leaders are the humble, honest ones who learn from failures and success. When we share the good, bad and ugly with each other, we all increase our knowledge.



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Review your SET:

What indicators or issues did you want to improve in this field? Using the Soil Evaluation Tool in Year 1, you should have identified priority indicators that you wanted to improve on your field. List those indicators in the grey box so you can reflect on them, now that Year 1 is complete.

How did your Year 1 practices affect your SET indicators? What did you see in the field? Why? Reflect on how the Year 1 practices affected these indicators, and what you saw in the field this year. Don't forget to ask yourself, or your mentor/TA why? Keep in mind we do the best we can with the information and resources we have at the time! The main point here is to start making connections between the impacts our management practices have on soil health – what's working, and why?

How will you address these indicators in Year 2? Brainstorm how you can improve these indicators with next years' practices.

Review your Plan:

Practices / Soil Health Principles / Goals: In the first section, the FARMS Admin will list the practices you had on your Y1 Plan, and the goals you had for those practices. Feel free to add anything we missed.

Did you hit your goals? Why/why not? Again, reflect on Y1 practices and if you hit the goals you had for the practices. List out what contributed to meeting/not meeting your goals. Brainstorm causes and solutions, if appropriate.

These goals may or may not have changed after year one. If you feel you made adequate progress towards your goals or if your understanding of your system changes enough to change your priorities, please update your goals. If your goals stay the same, please record your understanding of why it is appropriate to keep the goal(s) the same. Remember some soil health indicators may take multiple years to see change. There are no wrong answers! The point is to make sure you are evaluating the impact your management decisions have on your soil health system. This helps you both adjust and keep moving towards your goals and to celebrate when you reach goals.

How did these practices impact the rest of your operation? Economics, rotation, other conservation practices? List out any effects that these practices had on your operation as a whole.

What adjustments do you need to make in the future? Think about how you can improve the results from these practices, or add new / remove old practices, to improve the shortcomings you saw in Year 1.

Looking toward Year 2:

Comprehensive Soil Health Management Plan – On this page, list the fields that you'll be implementing practices on. List ALL the practices on those fields (including things you've been doing for years). This is the place where it shows how you're managing your field as a system, where practices intertwine and work with each other. Make sure to list your conservation practices (such as "no-till" or "cover crops"), not the individual jobs you'll be doing ("plant covers", "spray burn-down").

Tick the box on the right if the practice is payable through FARMS.



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Indicate if these practices together meet all 4+1 Soil Health Principles: Minimize Disturbance, Maximize Biodiversity, Maximize Living Root, Maximize Soil Cover, and optionally Integrate Livestock. All Plans must address the four soil health principles. Practices may address more than one challenge, which is expected. TAs cannot approve plans that do not address all four principles.

FARMS Practice Information

In this section, list only the practices which are payable by FARMS.

Practice: Just write the practice name

Goals: List out what goals you have for this practice in Year 2. This is where you can theorize how this practice will function in your field. We understand producers are experts in their own field and sometimes you can explain the nuances better than anyone! We will be working to evaluate practices that we can in turn share with NRCS, and this will help us to evaluate the success of new practices.

Assistance: Please let us know what peer or technical assistance would be helpful or needed to implement this practice. The technical assistance team, mentors and other FARMS producers will be a great resource. If they cannot provide the assistance you need, we will help you identify others who may be able to assist you.

TA Notes: The TA's might add additional comments or notes about these practices, especially after they've had a conversation with you.



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