

## A Look at Soil Quality

Soil quality is a key component in achieving optimum yields in your fields. Paying attention to your soil's needs will boost your crop yields and crop quality during weather extremes such as drought or wetness. Good soil quality can also aid in growing a more vigorous plant that better resists disease and insect pressure. Healthy soil is abundant with living organisms and other key qualities, which

pays to learn how the soil can work for you.

With the importance of soil quality in mind, The Lancaster Chamber, Lancaster Conservation District and Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture have partnered with Steve Groff, owner of Cedar Meadow Farm to offer the free 7th Annual Farm Field Day. To get a first hand look at the latest, most innovative farming

techniques that are proven to conserve soil while increasing productivity and sustainability, Cedar Meadow Farm in Holtwood, Lancaster County, is the place to be on July 26 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A good first step to take in improving soil quality is to analyze the soil in your own fields through a soil test and determine any weaknesses. Mike Hubbs from the Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Quality Institute in Auburn, AL will be demonstrating firsthand a "Soil Quality Kit" at the Field Day. This will give farmers the edge they need to identify weaknesses in their soil and gain advice to remedy any soil quality problems.

A popular exhibit at the Field Day is the 4-foot deep soil pit, which is coordinated by Dr. Ray Weil, University of Maryland. Dr. Weil will explain the soil structure and how you can improve it in your own fields. You will be able to see earthworm tunnels that go deep into the soil to observe the way plant roots travel to get nutrients. This exhibit is an excellent aid in

visualizing what your soil structure really looks like.

Erosion control is a major focus of the Field Day The use of cover crops helps to control erosion as well as improve soil tilth, increase organic matter levels, enhance water infiltration and lessen pest problems. During the Field Day you will have the opportunity to see Groff's "permanent cover cropping system" and hear about how you can incorporate a similar system on your own farm. Dr. Andrew Sharply will be operating the USDA/ARS National Phosphorous Study Rainfall Simulator to observe soil erosion potential and test if phosphorous is leaving the fields during rain simulations.

Soil compaction can be a key detriment to soil quality. The uses of crop rotations, cover crops and deep tillage are all methods that can be used to reduce the effects of compaction. During the Field Day, there will be several demonstrations of deep tillage equipment on some very compacted areas in fields.

Backhoe excavations will take place immediately following to allow you to see firsthand the results of the various deep tillage implements.

The Farm Field Day will highlight the latest farming practices, technology and equipment needed to help farmers positively impact their bottom line while respecting the environment. After attending this event, you will be able to formulate some ideas to use in your own operation to improve your soil quality. The free 7th Annual Farm Field Day will take place on July 26 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Cedar Meadow Farm, Holtwood, Lancaster County.

Please send your questions or comments about the Farm Field Day to Brent Landis at The Lancaster Chamber at blandis@lcci.com or 717-397-3531. For information or directions to the event, visit www.cedarmeadowfarm.com.

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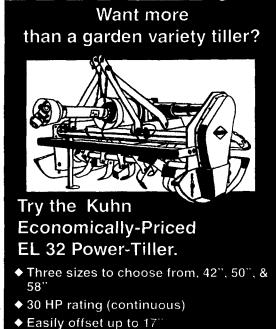
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