SARE: Advancing the Frontier of Sustainable Agriculture in...

New York

Project Highlight: To Improve the Soil, First Know the Soil

The importance of soil health cannot be overstated. It supports vigorous plant growth by promoting the efficient use of nutrients and water, protecting against erosion and compaction, and aiding in disease and pest management. Soil health drives farm productivity and resilience against weather extremes. But the soil is an incredibly complex environment, and for farmers to improve their ground, they first need to learn about its condition.

That is why, with SARE funding, a multidisciplinary team from Cornell University created a new kind of soil assessment. Traditional soil tests, which are also important management tools, are typically limited to measuring nutrient levels and pH. They do not reveal anything about the physical structure or microbial life present in the soil, yet such characteristics strongly influence crop yields as well as the efficiency of inputs such as water and fertilizer. In contrast, Cornell’s soil health assessment reports typically include management recommendations to address specifically identified constraints and promote soil-building practices such as cover cropping, reduced tillage, the use of compost or manure, and diversified rotations that include perennial crops.

The Cornell lab handles about 2,000 samples a year and is expanding in use.

For more information, see www.sare.org/projects, and search for project numbers LNE03-175, LNE-6-235 and ENE09-110.
SARE Grants in New York

SARE has awarded a total of 514 grants in New York since 1988.

SARE’s Impact

- 53 percent of producers report using a new production technique after reading a SARE publication.
- 79 percent of producers said they improved soil quality through their SARE project.
- 64 percent of producers said their SARE project helped them achieve higher sales.

Contact Your SARE State Coordinator

SARE sustainable ag coordinators run state-level educational programs for Extension and other ag professionals, and many help grant applicants and recipients with planning and outreach. Visit www.nesare.org/new-york to learn more.

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