

**NRCS CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANT**  
Semi-annual Progress Report

Grantee Name: Utah Association of Conservation District	
Project Title: Utah Soil Health Partnership On-Farm Trials	
Agreement Number: NR223A750013G009	
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Six Month Period Covered by Report: 5/24/2022 – 08/23/2022	
Project End Date: January 2027	

With the additional funding from the Utah legislature we have selected 17 on-farm trial sites. During the first 6 months of the project the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) has assisted UACD in the effort to recruit, evaluate, map, and perform baseline data collection from the 17 on farm demonstration sites throughout the state. We created agreements for each producer selected listing expectations for producer, USU (subcontractor), UDAF, and UACD. We held a “kick-off” meeting with producers to explain the program and each participating partner’s plan going forward for each of the on-farm trial sites. Five-year agreements were signed by producers for their incentive payments. We have been held up in writing soil health plans and beginning the incentive payment by needing NRCS to complete the CPA-52 for each site.

**Objectives:**

A. Identify attitudes/barriers to soil health

We have conducted in-depth interviews with twelve of the sixteen initial Utah producers who are participating in the on-farm trials and are continuing to try and set up interviews with the remaining three. We are also in the process of transcribing these interviews (nine are complete) and once done will start working on a report outlining the findings which will be shared with the project team. Analysis of the interview transcriptions will include coding and double-checking of the coding. We are also in the process of conducting and producing a literature review relevant to the project interests including the role of soil health as a motivating factor for implementing conservation practices, adoption and motivations to adopt of conservation tillage, cover crops, nutrient management best practices, and integrated crop and livestock management, starting first with the above topics as they have occurred in Utah and then branching out to similar western states which are similar in terms of agriculture, soil, and weather. We are also starting to prepare for the Utah grower and crop advisor surveys that will be conducted in early 2023. We are collecting questionnaires that other researchers have used to survey crop advisors and compiling research and questionnaires that focus on understanding farmers motivations to use soil and water conservation practices.

A. Quantify baseline soil health characteristics – not complete

B. 12 on-farm trial sites (now 17 sites)

Application of interest process. UDAF utilized the Utah Soil Health Partnership website along with social media outlets, local conservation districts and field staff to promote the application process for the On-Farm Soil Health Demonstration project. 40 applications of interest were completed and submitted through the website. 50% of these applications came from HU producers. All applications were divided up into the four main working groups and evaluated by the Soil Health Advisory Committee prior to selection. Criteria used to evaluate the applicants included previous experience with soil health practices, access to soil health equipment, HU status and location.

After selection the Utah Soil Health Program staff under UDAF was tasked with collecting and information, mapping of the site and collection of historical management data and conducting a baseline soil health in-field assessment. Soil maps developed from web soil survey to determine the number and location of the initial in-field assessments.

To date all but two of the sites have been made and had initial assessments completed. Due to weather during site visit one site has been mapped but no in-field assessment has been completed but is scheduled to be completed within the first two weeks of October. The last site is scheduled for completion by the end of September.

C. Development of Education and Outreach materials

Have contracted to develop a Utah Soil Health website to provide up to date information on soil health research and practices. This will include interactive educational pages which can be used by producers and educators alike.

D. Field Days/Workshops

The Utah Soil Health Partnership has stepped up our outreach efforts hosting small local field days and workshops that include utilizing the rainfall simulator and slake test to demonstrate the soil health principles. To date we have hosted 8 events across the state with an estimated 670 attendees.

E. Build regional collaboration through biannual regional soil health conferences

The Utah Soil Health Partnership held the first regional conference in February 2022 (prior to this agreement), the next conference is planned for February 2024.

Looking at the next six months, we will complete the soil health plans for each of the 17 on-farm trial sites and producers will begin to implement the soil health practices. Initial soil testing will be done in September/October and results will help to complete plans. Additional outreach efforts will continue through upcoming presentations and field day tours throughout the state. USU will complete and analyze initial interviews with participating producers.