**EU researchers test cost-saving and soil-protecting potential of farming techniques**

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**Body**

*Wageningen, The Netherlands –* “We’ve identified and are testing potential cropping systems that don’t just improve agricultural soil quality, they boost profitability.” That’s the simple message Jane Mills from the EU-funded SoilCare project is sending to the farming sector this Word Soil Day (5th December 2018).

Farms of all scales – from small organic to large industrial – can implement SoilCare’s Soil-Improving Cropping Systems (SICSs) to potentially cut costs and/or increase yield and quality, while protecting long-term soil health. The optimisation techniques may mean agrochemical inputs like fertilisers and herbicides can be drastically reduced.

SoilCare’s SICS include crop rotation and cover crops, tillage, organic amendments (such as humic acid and green manure), mulches and organic techniques. The project team has identified some specific SICS for farmers to use in preventing a range of soil threats when growing specific crop-types. The team’s review of SICSs also features agronomic techniques that will help optimise any existing cropping system regardless of crop-type or context. “The 16 study sites in SoilCare are now testing a range of SICSs and we are looking forward to learning about their advantages and drawbacks,” says project coordinator Dr Rudi Hessel based at Wageningen Environmental Research in the Netherlands.

The team’s results are timely, coming ahead of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s World Soil Day, and against a backdrop of the deteriorating health of Europe’s agricultural soils caused by overexploitation and poor management. At a European level, soil erosion affects over 12 million hectares of land – about 7.2% of the total agricultural land – and leads to €1.25 billion loss in crop productivity.

As the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organisation uses World Soil Day to raise awareness about soil health, it may come as little surprise to find out that soil doesn’t just impact our food supplies, it also helps clean water and lower risks of floods and droughts. More surprising is the SoilCare team’s efforts to treat profitability for farmers as a central priority – a consideration many research projects on environmental health overlook.

**CTA**

For more information on potential soil-improving cropping systems, visit [www.soilcare-project.eu/soil-improving-cropping-systems](http://www.soilcare-project.eu/soil-improving-cropping-systems)

Additional

Soil fact: There is more biodiversity contained in a teaspoon of healthy soil than there are people on the planet.

**SoilCare Boiler Plate**The aim of the EU-funded SoilCare project is to identify, evaluate and promote promising soil-improving cropping systems and agronomic techniques that increase both the profitability and sustainability of agriculture in Europe. This project has received funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 Programme.