Planning leads to sustainable improvements on U.S. Soy farms

U.S. soybean farmers are leading the way in conservation – the vast majority of soybean farmers participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Program, and most farmers participate in certified and audited voluntary sustainability and conversation programs.[3]

POST HARVEST PLAN PRACTICES

Participation in conservation efforts cannot happen without proper planning. There isn't a lot of downtime for U.S. soybean farmers—before one crop comes out, it's time to start preparing for the next. As leaders in natural resource conservation, soybean farmers prioritize sustainable practices in the plans they make for each crop year. One of the first decisions farmers make is what to plant. Many choose soybeans for their beneficial qualities:

Soybeans are a valuable crop to use in rotation with a grass crop, providing a legume/broadleaf season that **breaks disease and pest cycles.** Rotation also limits the development of resistant diseases, weeds and insects.

Soybeans use nutrients efficiently. Because they are legumes, soybeans don't need additional nitrogen fertilizer applications, so there is little to no chance of excess nitrogen run-off that leads to problems "downstream."

Soil sampling in the fall can provide farmers with **specific fertility prescriptions across the field for nutrients their soybeans may need**. The knowledge gained from sampling is incorporated into their plan, giving them time to consider sustainable options. It also provides the required specificity to support variable rate technology and nutrient applications that are limited to and placed precisely where needed.

A plan that includes **double-crop soybeans**—soybeans planted after the harvest of another crop—provides the conservation benefit of keeping living roots growing during the season and limiting opportunities for erosion.

U.S. soybean farmers have taken the lead in cover crop usage and no-till practices, limiting soil and nutrient loss, protecting the soil surface and raising soil organic matter content. Both practices require adequate preparation and management.

Government-supported conservation programs provide incentives for many farmers' sustainability goals and plans. Some programs take farmland out of production for use as conservation resources, such as water quality protection, soil conservation and improvement, wildlife habitat expansion and grassland habitat renewal. Approximately 15% of U.S. farmland is currently set aside for conservation, forest development and wildlife habitat.[2]

Each decision and each plan that a soybean farmer makes provides an opportunity to actively pursue sustainable production.

And they're always looking to improve—consulting advisers, university research, industry publications and other resources to learn how to be more productive with less adverse impact on their local environment, on their region's natural resources and global health.

47% DECREASE

Between 1982 and 2015, soil erosion from U.S. soybean production decreased 47% per acre, thanks to the early and consistent adoption of conservation practices by soybean growers.[1]

As leaders in natural resource conservation and the use of resilient agricultural practices, U.S. soybean farmers prioritize these practices in the planning and evaluation of their crops each year. This ongoing planning and evaluation that prioritize sustainability practices are also a part of U.S. Soy farmers long-term impact towards advancing many of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 2—Zero Hunger. Specifically, SDG Target 2.4, says, "*By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and* ***implement resilient agricultural practices*** *that increase* ***productivity*** *and production, that help* ***maintain ecosystems***, *that strengthen capacity for* **adaptation to climate change**, *extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that* **progressively improve land and soil quality**."

[1] Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, 2016. Environmental and Socioeconomic Indicators for Measuring Outcomes of On Farm Agricultural Production in the United States (Third Edition). ISBN: 978-0-692-81902-9.

[2] U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017 Census of Agriculture.

[3] US Soy Sustainability Assurance Protocol.

About The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC)

Soybeans are the United States' No. 1 food and agricultural export. The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) is focused on building preference, improving the value, and enabling market access for the use of U.S. Soy for human consumption, aquaculture, and livestock feed in 90 countries across the world. USSEC is a dynamic partnership of U.S. soybean producers, processors, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusinesses, and agricultural organizations; and connects food and agriculture industry leaders through a robust membership program. USSEC is farmer-funded by checkoff funds invested by the United Soybean Board, various state soybean councils, the food and agriculture industry, and the American Soybean Association's investment of cost-share funding provided by U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). To learn more, visit www.ussec.org and www.ussoy.org, and engage with us on USSEC's LinkedIn, X, Facebook, and U.S. Soy's LinkedIn, X, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

USSOY | USSEC