22 Organizations Working to Restore Soils in 2016

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According to the recent United Nations report, Status of the World's Soil Resources, the world can ameliorate soil degradation if more sustainable practices are promptly implemented. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines soil degradation as "a change in the soil health status resulting in a diminished capacity of the ecosystem to provide goods and services for its beneficiaries. Degraded soils have a health status, such that they do not provide the normal goods and services of the particular soil in its ecosystem."

Soils are naturally incredibly diverse. One teaspoon of soil could contain billions of microbes, thousands of species of protozoa and fungi, mites, and nematodes, and a couple of termite species. But a 2003 study, "Soil Diversity and Land Use in the United States," published by the University of Berkeley, found that 4.5 percent of the soils in the United States are in danger of substantial loss or complete extinction as a result of urbanization and agriculture. In sub-Saharan Africa, soil is under threat as a result of overgrazing and other unsustainable practices.

According to FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, "further loss of productive soils would severely damage food production and food security, amplify food-price volatility, and potentially plunge millions of people into hunger and poverty." It is imperative that we take action now to protect and renew soils to ensure a more food secure future.

Luckily, there are solutions. One answer is growing a diversity of crops. Monoculture crops like corn and soybeans tend to be hard on soils, depleting nutrients rather than restoring them. But growing crops in rotation and growing a variety of crops can help restore soils and help both large and small farms produce more nutrients per acre or hectare.

Farmers all over the world are also revitalizing soils by incorporating cover crops such as winter wheat, rye, and clover or planting perennial varieties of sorghum, sunflower, and wheatgrasses that can help hold soils in place.

Thankfully, there are hundreds of organizations and individuals working to improve soil health and restore land quality, and Food Tank is excited to highlight 22 of these projects which recognize that soil is more than just dirt.

- African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100)—AFR100, an African-led initiative funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Resources Institute, aims to bring 100 million hectares of degraded forest landscapes into the process of restoration by 2030. The initiative seeks to carry out the restoration project in a balanced way that includes women, local communities, and vulnerable people.
- Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in India (AKRSP)—An offspring of the Aga Khan Foundation, AKRSP strives to provide communities with food security, increased net incomes, and improved outcomes for farmers. To date, AKRSP's programs have enhanced over 40,000 hectares of land in India's rural areas. The programs are composed of watershed groups, irrigation and groundwater recharge systems, river basin management, and over 1,000 check dams and irrigation tanks.
- Asia Soil Conservation Network for the Humid Tropics (ASOCON)—Formed in 1989 with the support of United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the FAO, ASOCON strives to assist member countries in developing and disseminating soil and water conservation practices for small-scale farmers. It is composed of a coordinating unit at the Ministry of Forestry in Jakarta and National Coordinating Committees established by China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Hosting regional workshops and training, ASOCON helps small-scale farmers be more sustainable and productive. ASOCON has also worked on the Conservation of Lands in Asia and the Pacific project.
- The British Society of Soil Science—Founded in 1947, The British Society of Soil Science furthers the study of soil, encourages participation from all those interested in the study of use and soil, and issues an annual publication. The Society serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas for soil improvement and provides a framework for soil scientists to represent their views to other organizations and decisionmaking bodies.
- DeCo!—DeCo! is a Ghanaian NGO that uses a social business approach to produce organic fertilizer for small farmers. It strives to include the local community in

its work as much as possible while using rich organic compost to double farmers' crop yields and increase food security.

- The Hummingbird Project—This project trains rural farmers in India's suicide belt, an area in Punjab state where there is a high rate of farmer suicides. The program teaches about the soil food web and various composting techniques in the hopes of facilitating a transition back to organic, natural farming methods. Since 2011, The Hummingbird Project has reached 2,500 individuals in six states across India and has provided infrastructures such as water harvesting and compost and irrigation systems to 12 farmers' cooperatives.
- International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC)—Established in 1966, ISRIC is an independent institute in The Netherlands that prioritizes work in three areas: soil data and soil mapping, application of soil data in global development issues, and training and education. To celebrate its 50th anniversary this year, ISRIC has many events planned throughout 2016 which will highlight its history and focus on its future.
- Kiss the Ground—This organization uses media campaigns, community gardening, and networking to preserve soil in California. Kiss the Ground emphasizes the potential for healthy soil to sequester carbon, reduce climate change, and pave the way for better water supplies, restored habitats, and improved farming.
- The Land Institute—Founded in 1976, The Land Institute is a science-based research organization that uses nature as a model for agriculture to promote sustainable food production. The Land Institute accomplishes this through growing perennial grains in mixtures to create ecosystems that reflect the productivity and resilience of prairies. Other goals include ending soil erosion, moving away from chemical inputs in agriculture, restoring soil health, cutting back on carbon emissions, and enhancing food security. The organization's recent strategy focuses on partnering with public institutions to further research the Natural Systems Agriculture.
- People 4 Soil—People 4 Soil is an open network of European NGOs, research institutes, farmers associations, and environmental groups that aim to have Europe recognize soil as a common good. People 4 Soil wants to prioritize soil in the European Union's legislation, so they launched an online petition to be promoted by European citizens that calls for giving a right to the soil.
- RECARE—RECARE aims to prevent and remediate soil degradation in Europe through better land care. RECARE noticed a dearth of knowledge on soil threats in Europe particularly regarding the functioning and complexity of soil systems and how they are affected by human activities. They use 17 case studies covering a range of soil threats in different socio-economic and bio-physical environments across Europe to integrate and advance the knowledge of stakeholders and scientists.
- The Red Soil Project—This project, with offices in Uganda and Canada, teaches the building blocks of sustainable agriculture to African farmers to improve productivity and create self-sufficient communities which can be sustainable without the help of aid. To reach rural farmers, The Red Soil Project partners with local community organizations and utilizes their existing community networks to deliver hands-on workshops in soil building, integrated pest management, rocket stoves, agroforestry, and animal husbandry.
- Rodale Institute—The Rodale Institute, located in Pennsylvania, conducts independent agricultural research in the field with the objective of giving farmers the knowledge and tools to improve soil health, yields, and crop quality while simplifying farm management.

By helping to build healthy soils through organic practices, the Rodale Institute wants to ensure that people feel confident that they are feeding their families food that is good for them and the world around them.

- Society for Ecological Restoration (SER)—Comprised of ecosystem activists around the world, SER is a nonprofit organization focused on promoting and advancing the sciences and practices of ecological restoration. It aims to address desertification, land and water degradation, and associated loss of sustainable livelihoods. SER also has its own scientific and technical peer-reviewed journal titled "Restoration Ecology."
- Soil Association—Based in the United Kingdom, Soil Association campaigns for healthy, humane, and sustainable food, farming, and land use. The organization works in schools through the Food for Life Partnership to improve health outcomes for children. Additionally, through the Soil Association Certification, the U.K.'s largest organic certification body, Soil Association creates and develops consumer trust and knowledge about organic food.
- Soil Conservation Service of Iceland (SCSI)—SCSI is a governmental agency founded in 1907 that operates under the Ministry for the Environment in Iceland. Recognizing that soil degradation is the largest environmental problem in Iceland, SCSI is dedicated to working both on the large-scale, policymaking level, as well as on the small-scale level with reclamation projects. SCSI also is part of the United Nations University's Land Restoration Training Programme.
- Soil Science Society of America (SSSA)—Founded in 1936 and based in Madison, Wisconsin, SSSA is made up of thousands of members and certified professionals who are dedicated to advancing the soil science field. SSSA provides information about soil topics such as ecosystem sustainability, waste management, and wise land use. The Society is also part of the Alliance of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Science Societies.
- Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS)—SWCS, a nonprofit organization founded in 1943, is based in Iowa but has chapters throughout the United States and Canada and over 4,000 members around the world. Its mission is to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation and improve the way land is used to produce food. SWCS also published the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, which focuses on the science and art of natural resource management for sustainability.
- Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL)—Based in Haiti and founded in 2006, SOIL is dedicated to transforming human waste into useful resources. SOIL uses EcoSan, an ecological sanitation process that returns nutrients from human waste to the soil. SOIL operates under a Liberation Ecology philosophy that the most threatened and marginalized people will be found living in similarly threatened ecosystems. This philosophy guides SOIL's focus on promoting dignity, health, and sustainable livelihoods.
- Trees for the Future—Trees for the Future is dedicated to planting Forest Gardens that provide families and livestock with sustainable food sources as well as increased annual income. The organization currently has fourteen tree-planting projects in Cameroon, Kenya, Senegal, Uganda, and Tanzania, which are helping to restore soil that was unproductive for decades.
- Valle La Paz—Valle La Paz, based in Mexico, believes that there can be no healthy man on a sick planet. The organization educates youth about environmental conservation and

healthy lifestyles, and it works to increase soil fertility by creating agricultural biodiversity.

- World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT)—Founded in 1992 and based in Switzerland, WOCAT is a global network of specialists in soil and water conservation. WOCAT supports innovation and decisionmaking processes in Sustainable Land Management. WOCAT was officially recognized by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 2014 as the most highly recommended database for Sustainable Land Management best practices.