

Healthy Soils Update

Recently, the Brown administration recognized the importance of soil health in the Governor's 2015-16 proposed budget; "as the leading agricultural state in the nation, it is important for California's soils to be sustainable and resilient to climate change. Increased carbon in soils is responsible for numerous benefits including increased water holding capacity, increased crop yields and decreased sediment erosion..." CDFA is coordinating this initiative under its existing authority provided by the Environmental Farming Act. CDFA has pulled together a working group of staff from CalEPA agencies and California Department of Conservation to discuss the development and coordination of the initiative.

Ideas being considered include short-term actions, such as establishing goals for building soil organic matter; establishment of a coordinator for healthy soils; identifying needed research; adding healthy soils as a management practice; encouraging healthy soils building under current regulatory programs (e.g., irrigated lands program). Long-term actions include identification of financing opportunities, market development, research, increasing composting operations, and continued interagency coordination.

On March 11, State and Regional Water Board staff met with CDFA to specifically discuss the irrigated lands regulatory program's nitrogen management plan template and how the use of composted material could be encouraged under the program. Because using composted material is a nitrogen source, the nitrogen template requires growers to track application. However, in addition to being a source of nitrogen, the use of compost can be considered a management practice that will build moisture retention, reduce erosion, and increase crop yield. Staff will be continuing these discussions with CDFA and the State Water Board.