



# The Maine Healthy Soils Program

Maine Climate Council  
Natural Working Lands Work Group  
May 12, 2026

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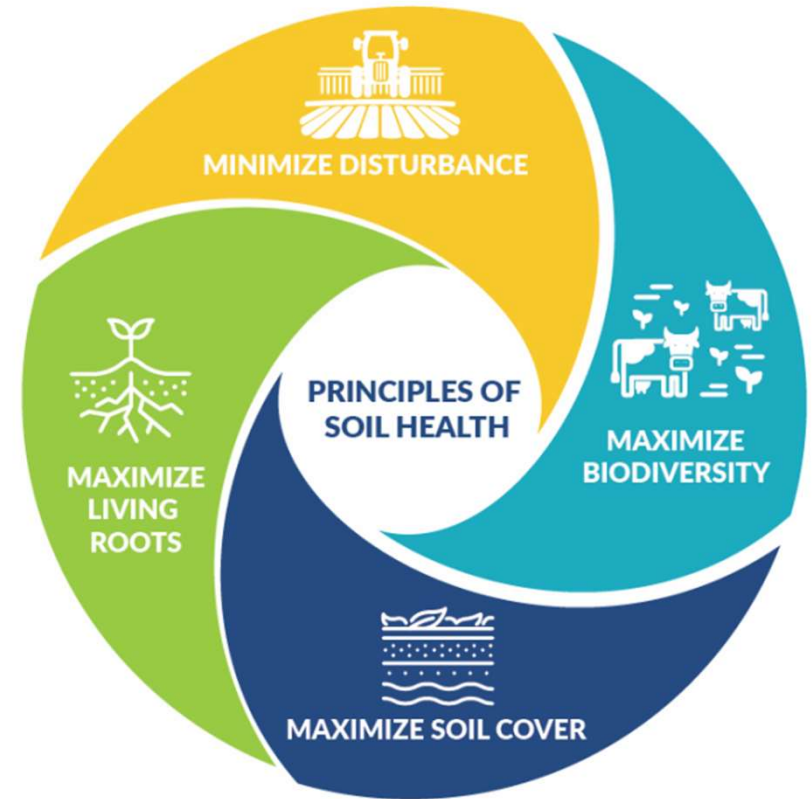


## Three Pillars

1. Soil health is accessible, adaptable, and trustworthy.
2. Committing to soil health principles on the farm can create stability that will keep farms running through uncertainty.
3. We are behind.

# What the heck is soil health?

An academic abstraction of basic farming practices blended with a fundamental understanding of the site-specific soil ecosystem.





# Soil Health Legislation

LD 437 (130<sup>th</sup> Legislature):

- Improve health and yield of agricultural soils
- Protect biological diversity in ag soils
- Increase greenhouse gas drawdown
- Promote soil health best practices



# LD 437: Responsibilities

Provide educational material to farmers:

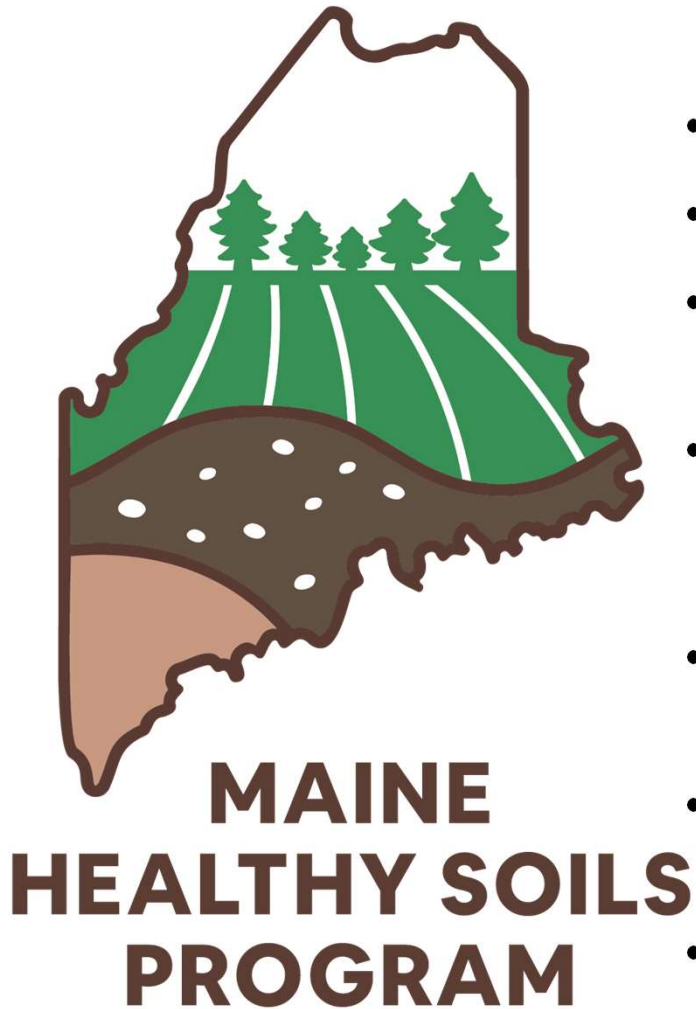
- Increase farmer-to-farmer outreach + education
- Facilitate peer learning
- Build a network of practitioners and technical experts
- Aggregate funding opportunities



# LD 437: Responsibilities

Develop new financial and technical assistance opportunities:

- Identify market-based incentives
- Support promotional activities
- Provide funding for TA, FA, and research
- Enhance other state and federal programs



# Milestones

- **June 2021:** MHSP Created
- **July 2022:** State Soil Scientist hired to administer program
- **November 2024:** Rules finalized, creating 6 new funding programs to support farmer soil health efforts
- **April – October 2025:** Partnered with Woods End Lab to provide no-cost soil health testing to 70 farms in Maine (\$50,000)
- **May 2025:** Funded 11 farmer soil health projects (\$500,000)
- **November 2025:** Funded 2 soil health technical assistance/research projects (\$400,000)
- **May 2026:** Funded 19 farmer soil health projects (\$960,000)

# Soil Health Testing

| Soil Health Panel  | Units    |       | RANKING: |
|--------------------|----------|-------|----------|
| Microbial Rate     | ppm      | 25.6  | V Low    |
| Solvita Response   | ( 0 - 6) | 2.93  | Low      |
| Soil Amino-N       | ppm      | 121   | Medium   |
| Crumb Aggregates   | Vol %    | 21    | Low      |
| Scoop Bulk Density | g/cc     | 1.03  | Optimal  |
| Total Carbon       | %        | 3.350 | Med-High |

| Soil Health Panel  | Units    |       | RANKING: |
|--------------------|----------|-------|----------|
| Microbial Rate     | ppm      | 108.5 | High     |
| Solvita Response   | ( 0 - 6) | 4.38  | Medium   |
| Soil Amino-N       | ppm      | 400   | VHigh    |
| Crumb Aggregates   | Vol %    | 12    | Low      |
| Scoop Bulk Density | g/cc     | 0.87  | Optimal  |
| Total Carbon       | %        | 8.120 | High     |

**Goal:** Provide foundational data to farmers that will improve the rate of soil health practice adoption

- How does it work?
- 2025 – 70 farms
- 2026 – 30 farms
- Return data with customized soil health options
- [Continued technical assistance](#) via soil health management planning/coaching

# Soil Health Implementation Grant



**Goal:** Provide funding to farmers to address barriers to improving soil health on the farm

- Competitive grant (max. request \$100,000 in 2025, \$65,000 in 2026)
- Equipment, practice improvement, innovations, and trials
- 2025 cycle: received 71 applications (~\$4.5 million total funding request), 11 funded (farms ranging in size from 1 – 1,000 acres)
- 2026 cycle: received 98 applications (~\$4.7 million total funding request), 19 funded (farms ranging in size from 1 – 673 acres)

# Technical Assistance Capacity Grant



**Goal:** Provide funding to technical service providers to enhance farmer access to soil health knowledge and technical assistance

- Competitive grant (max. request \$185,000, 3-year contracts)
- Personnel, direct and indirect technical support, research
- Launched in May 2025, received 9 applications, funded 2

# NRCS Top-Off Program



**Goal:** Incentivize participation in NRCS EQIP and CSP programs by offering additional payments to participants

- Non-competitive: all applicants with eligible practice codes who apply will receive a payment according to our formula
- Specific to soil health practice codes – a list will be available when the RFA goes live
- Advances are available
- Anticipated launch: Summer 2026 with a \$300,000 funding pool

# Equipment Share Grant



**Goal:** Provide funding to technical service organizations to develop equipment share programs throughout Maine

- Competitive grant (max. request \$250,000)
- For the purchase of soil health farm equipment and personnel to manage the program
- Pilot program – will fund 1 – 2 projects and collect data on equipment usage before offering additional funding opportunities
- Anticipated launch: Mid 2026

# Payment for Practice Program



**Goal:** Provide payments to farmers for the establishment and maintenance of soil health practices

- Pilot program to launch in 2026
- 5-year contract for implementation of practices. Includes a base payment plus a per-unit rate that varies based on the number of practices used
- Program structure still in development, currently into to have separate open windows for crop and pasture-based livestock operation

# Thank you!

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