



CFS 50: Side Event 28

Future-proofing soils: the role of youth actionable data in accelerating the transition towards a nature-positive food system

This side-event, which took place on 13 October in the FAO Mexico Room, focused on the role of data and youth to accelerate the uptake of practices improving soil health and transforming food systems. Hosted by the Government of Thailand, the event was co-organized by the Coalition on Action for Soil Health (CA4SH) and the Global Farmers Network.

Speakers

Opening remarks: Ratchanok Sangpenchan, PhD. Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Rome-based agencies.

Panel moderator: Alzbeta Klein, CEO/Director General, International Fertilizer Association

Panel:

- Dr. Leigh Ann Winowiecki, Soil and Land Health Global Research Lead, CIFOR-ICRAF
- Ronald Vargas, Secretary of the Global Soil Partnership, FAO
- Davide Ceper, CEO, Varda
- Knud Bay Smidt, Farmer and member of the Global Farmers Network
- Leonardus Vergutz, Chair in Soil Science at UM6P
- Dr. Matthias Pohl, Head of Global Societal Outreach, Agricultural Solutions, BASF

Event objective: To hear from policy and government representatives, young farmers, researchers, and entrepreneurs & multinationals about how field-level data and innovations can be made more accessible and actionable to accelerate the adoption of practices that will improve soil health.

Panel discussion:

Each panellist brought a unique insight into the issue of data accessibility and actionability for soil health.

Dr Sangpenchan opened the discussion by highlighting policy priorities put in place by the government of Thailand that had led to an uptick of digital applications among farmers, and increased farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing.

Dr Leigh Ann Winowiecki shared the technologies developed by CIFOR-ICRAF for systematic field sampling, and her work in engaging youth lead farmers in monitoring soil health and sharing good practices. She also highlighted the objectives of the Coalition on Action for Soil Health, which include increasing financial incentives for farmers making a transition to more sustainable soil and land management practices.

Ronald Vargas shared the perspective of an international organization dedicated to the promotion of sustainable soil management globally. He explained the Global Soil Partnership's multisectoral outreach approach: to governments to adopt supportive policies, to research centres and scientists to obtain the best available data, and to farmers for the implementation of best management practices.

David Ceper, CEO of the startup Varda, explained the role of his technology to remove barriers to data interoperability by creating a "universal language" to identify fields across countries, allowing for a better exchange of data on soil properties.

Knud Bay Smidt brought the farmer's perspective, explaining his use of GPS technologies and soil sensors to best apply inputs and monitor weather events. He also explained the increasing pressure growers were facing from governments and consumers to show how their crops were grown, which only a combination of data and technology could help them achieve with more efficiency at a lower environmental impact.

Leonardus Vergütz presented the outcomes of a joint European Union- African Union project which had identified soil security as the core condition for a green transition in Africa. Making soils secure would lead to food and water security, and would be achieved by the uptake of sustainable soil management practices by farmers, helping them break cycles of poverty and reverse land degradation.

Dr Matthias Pohl concluded the speakers' remarks by sharing the perspective of input providers, highlighting the joint priorities for making data more available to growers for better field management, and understanding data relating to soil carbon sequestration.

Discussion outcomes:

The event concluded with some key recommendations for policymakers, including:

- Soils need to be managed from a long-term perspective,
- Include soil biodiversity in national soil surveys, to better understand the living nature of soils,
- Integrate soils into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs),
- Give value to soils,
- Simplify metrics to measure soil health,
- Use the whole toolbox of innovations.

Recording:

<https://fao.zoom.us/rec/play/-fjkQuYXO24-CK9j8ghoh3rms9oQAllaC0GocdSTzK0eaiCTF652EgOSPWBay-8BkWWaw-JfB63Xmf2S.bRgv13EqA31wynX>