

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Soil and Plant Science Division

Southern Great Plains Region 9



MLRA Soil Survey Office: 9-STW

Active and Adaptive Land Management Presented at Oklahoma Soil Health Workshops

Purpose

This past year, Colin Walden, Range Management Specialist, assigned to the Region 9, MLRA Office in Stillwater, Oklahoma, has served on the Oklahoma Soil Health Team consisting of USDA NRCS and Oklahoma Conservation Commission employees. The Soil Health Team conducts workshops and meetings throughout Oklahoma. These meetings are hosted by local conservation districts as well as Native American tribes in order to broaden producers' knowledge of soil health practices on cropland and grazinglands. Colin, joined by Steve Alspach, OK NRCS State Soil Scientist and Greg Scott, OK Conservation Commission (retired NRCS Soil Scientist), engage with producers, field questions, and explain best management practices to maintain and improve healthy soils within the state.

Background

Walden focuses his talking points on the variability in weather patterns from year to year as they relate to grazingland management and soil health. In order to maintain and improve soil health on rangeland and pastureland, we must be able to adapt our grazing strategies to the current growing season conditions. Stocking rate is one the most important factors in grazingland management, relying on average production estimates will often cause a producer to be under or over stocked. Colin encouraged producers to set up their own monitoring system for pastures to effectively estimate the forage produced. Establishing a monitoring system and being flexible in managing working lands, can help producers meet soil health objectives in the best and worst weather years.



Colin Walden (l) and Steve Alspach (r) lead the discussion on land management practices at a Soil Health Workshop in Antlers, Oklahoma.



Key Outcomes

Incorporating livestock into cropland systems was also discussed at these meetings. While grazing cover crops can be beneficial in certain systems, Colin once again emphasized that producers monitor how much livestock are consuming through the grazing process. The cover crops are planted to help improve the soil health and overgrazing can terminate the crop, doing so will nullify many of the benefits that the plants provide.



Attendees enjoyed a “home grown” meal during the Soil Health Workshop in Watonga, Oklahoma. Presenters were PJ Martin, Resource Conservationist, Watonga OK Field Office (l. seated), Colin Walden (r. seated), and Troy Marshall, USDA-NASS (standing).

Conclusion

Producers must “weigh out” the benefits to the soil and the extra gains on the cattle so they can achieve a balance in their operations. The overarching theme of these discussions is management. Many people are looking for a perfect system for success, however the key to success is ***active and adaptive land management***.

Information on the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Oklahoma Soil Health Partnership can be found at: https://www.ok.gov/conservation/Programs/Soil_Health/. More workshops are scheduled for the remainder of 2019.

