Kerrville MLRA Soil Survey Office and NRCS Texas

Demonstrating Our Love of Soils

Purpose

On January 10th and 11th, 2020 Dennis Brezina, Texas NRCS Soil Health Specialist, in Temple, Texas and Travis Waiser, SPSD, MLRA Leader, Soil Scientist, in Kerrville, Texas took part in a Soil Health Principles training “For the Love of Soil.” This training was hosted by a local producer, ROAM Ranch, in Gillespie County, Texas with keynote speaker, Nicole Masters. Producers from all over the country were able to learn about Soil Health principles. About 80 producers from Texas, as well as producers from Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Oklahoma, Louisiana, California, and New Mexico attended the 2-day training program.

Travis Waiser (left) and Dennis Brezina (right) demonstrate soil infiltration and soil stability.

Background

In two breakout sessions, Dennis Brezina and Travis Waiser tag teamed the soil infiltration and soil stability discussions and demonstrations. Working together they demonstrated the Texas NRCS rainfall simulator on five different sites, four sites were on the ROAM Ranch and one site was on a neighboring property. The sites from the ROAM Ranch included an irrigated Tifton 85 bermudagrass field used historically for hay production; an old plowed field with two years of fall and summer cover crops; a bare plowed field; and a native vegetation field. The neighboring field was chosen to show dominate management style in the area of continuous grazing with inorganic fertilizer application. The producers were able to see the differences in runoff and infiltration rates between the different managements between fields. The ROAM Ranch has been using Plains Bison and cover crops to improve their soils and bringing them back to life.

For the final demonstration, the producers were also able to see the difference between two soil profiles and how stable the soil aggregates were based on soil management practices. The first area showed compaction and very slow infiltration; and the second area was along a fence line with much better aggregation and a much quicker infiltration rate. During this demonstration, attendees learned how they could test their own soil infiltration at home.

At the end of the question and answer session, Dennis and Travis spent time with the individual producers, answering questions regarding their own properties.

Key Outcomes

The producers were extremely impressed with the demonstrations and were eager to get home to do some of their own infiltration test on their own soils. We hope from these one-on-one discussions many will find their local NRCS offices and see how some of the other NRCS programs can help them find the appropriate conservation practices and apply soil health principles to reach their goals.

Future Goals

One thing is certain, if the combined miles traveled by participants is any indication about the excitement of producers learning about soil health, you can definitely see that excitement is high! Continuing to provide Soil Health Training sessions accessible to everyone is paramount in protecting our soils and natural resources.

Dennis Brezina (left) and Travis Waiser (right) demonstrate how to set-up an “at-home” soil infiltration test.