

SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

Southwest Soil Region

Tucson, Arizona, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Office (SSO)

Earth Day Celebration in Phoenix, Arizona

Purpose

In order to help protect our natural resources and feed a growing world, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) capitalizes on opportunities to inspire people to conserve the land and keep it healthy and educate them about the tools and knowledge we have to help accomplish this. Outreach takes many forms, including teaching future generations about what we do. The Tucson MLRA SSO has established a relationship with Mountain Trail Middle School (MTMS) in Phoenix, Arizona, to plant that seed of inspiration into the future generations of land stewards. On April 21st, 2023, Tucson MLRA SSO employees Andreas Khechfe and Michael Piotrowski set up a table at the middle school's Earth Day celebration to educate students about the work that NRCS does and how living things relate to soil.

Background

The Tucson MLRA SSO was invited to participate in the MTMS Earth Day celebration organized by the Environmental Adventure teacher, Brian Minnick. This event brought together many different organizations from across Arizona that work with natural resources to show middle school students what they do in the context of Earth Day and conservation.

Our NRCS booth included tools we use in the field, like a Montana sharpshooter and a soil auger, samples of unique soils, and dried saguaro parts that demonstrated the importance of the plant for local ecosystems. We also brought the NRCS' inflatable soil tunnel, which helped draw attention to our booth and educated students about soil science and the importance of healthy soil.

Key Outcomes

The Tucson MLRA SSO's participation in the Earth Day celebration helped us make connections with the students and other presenters to further their interest in soils and natural resource conservation. The tunnel, tools, and samples allowed the students to experience soils information in a unique and memorable way. It introduced them to ways to help conserve the land and to a career path they may not have known about before.



Figure 1.—The interior of the inflatable soil tunnel that we brought as a part of our booth. Information on soil properties and the importance of soil is printed on the sides of the tunnel.



Figure 2.—Andreas Khechfe (left) and Michael Piotrowski (right) at the NRCS table for the MTMS Earth Day event.