

SOIL ... IN YOUR HANDS

Soil erosion takes away nutrients, organic matter and micro-organisms that are essential for life. There are, however, practical steps that individuals and communities can take.



Replanting forests: tree roots help to anchor soils in place and slow the force of the wind over open ground



Adopting good agricultural practices such as permanent soil cover, terracing, reduced tillage



Restoring wetlands: in addition to providing natural habitats, wetlands absorb rainwater and carbon and prevent soil being carried away

Soil is a fundamental natural resource that influences numerous policy areas. It is not only vital for a healthy environment but also essential to agriculture, and indeed the entire food sector. Without it, Europe's sustainable bioeconomy will not be able to grow. Being soil aware will also help regenerate formerly polluted sites, creating jobs and growth and helping to ensure that this precious resource – which after all, our planet is named after – is not wasted.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

DG ENV land use / soil pages

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index_en.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/land_use/index_en.htm

<http://esdac.jrc.ec.europa.eu/content/soil-atlas-europe>



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HEALTHY SOIL

What's in it for you?

Soil, a thin layer that hosts a quarter of our planet's biodiversity

It produces food and raw materials, cleans drinking water and hosts organisms with pharmaceutical potential

Fertile soil also prevents erosion, retains water, reduces flood risks and stores huge amounts of carbon

Protecting this fragile non-renewable resource is crucial to ensuring a healthy future

Soil is life!

Did you know ...



It can take up to **500 years** to form **2 cm** of fertile soil



95 % of our food is directly or indirectly produced from our soils



1000 km² of soil (the equivalent of a city like Berlin) disappears every year in Europe under expanding cities and infrastructure

TAKING CARE OF SOIL

Healthy soil = a healthy environment

Soil not only makes life on Earth possible – it also helps to fight climate change. Some 70 billion tons of organic carbon – equivalent to almost 50 times the EU's annual emissions – is kept locked beneath our feet. This is the second biggest reservoir of carbon on the planet, next to the oceans. Just another reason why maintaining healthy soil is so important!

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The EU has committed to the UN's post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, which set a number of aspirational objectives such as ending poverty and hunger. A commitment on land use includes a pledge to stop land degradation and substantially reduce the number of deaths caused by soil pollution and contamination, all by 2030.



1

Almost a third of global soil has been spoiled by human activity ...

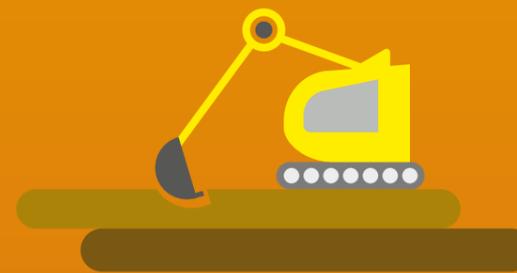
The EU aims to ensure that by 2020 land is managed sustainably and soil adequately protected.



2

How can we feed a growing global population without causing further environmental damage?

Farmers can produce food in a more sustainable way, using practices that improve soil quality.



3

Almost 1 000 km² of agricultural or natural land disappears every year in the EU ...

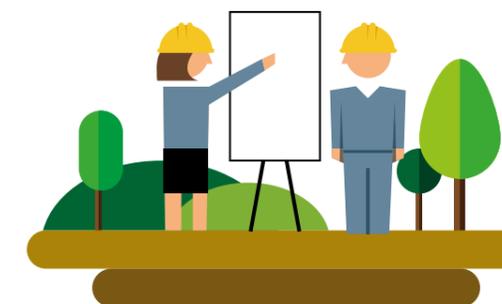
The EU wants to stop sealing up our most fertile soil – once soil is gone, it's gone. A target of “no net land take” has been set for 2050.



4

How can the “consumption” of natural land in the EU be limited?

Instead of expanding cities into new zones, abandoned industrial sites could be revived. Contaminated sites can be cleaned up and turned into new building or recreation areas.



TAPPING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Fixing up degraded areas from the industrialisation legacy provides economic opportunities and a viable business sector, driving research into new clean-up technologies. In fact, Europe's soil remediation sector has a turnover of €2.5 billion and employs 16 000.



EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT

The EU is committed to ensuring that by 2020 land is managed sustainably, soil is adequately protected and the remediation of contaminated sites is well underway. EU-funded projects have helped to find new ways of cleaning up; clever innovations include micro-organisms to treat polluted soil. The EU's new LIFE programme, which supports environmental action, has an increased focus on soil protection.

MAPPING THE EARTH

The Commission recently published the first-ever Global Atlas of Soil Biodiversity, mapping the entire planet. To date, only 1 % of soil micro-organisms have been identified!