

Soil Foodweb Insights

April 2010

We hope you've all had a Happy Earth Day!

Our workshops here in Corvallis are once again a success, going on as I write this. The next workshops are tentatively set for late August. Registration forms will become available once we have dates finalized. They'll be at <http://www.soilfoodweb.com/calendar.html> - if you have any difficulty finding or downloading the forms from there, call David at Sustainable Studies Institute: 541-257-2614, or send email to info@sustainablestudies.org - he will make sure you get the information you require.

Our newsletter is necessarily short this time around. We have several exciting projects under development, but not quite ready for their public unveiling just yet. Stay tuned!

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I. Soil Foodweb Oregon News

A. U.S. holiday schedule

The offices and laboratory at Soil Foodweb Oregon will be open during regular business hours for the rest of April and almost all of May. The U.S. Postal Service and other package carriers will not make deliveries (and our offices will also be closed) for:

Monday, 31 May 2010 (Memorial Day).

Meanwhile, we hope everybody who celebrates it will have a happy Cinco de Mayo on 5 May 2010. ■

II. Sustainable Studies Institute News

A. Upcoming workshops

1. Oregon: August 2010

Our next set of workshops here in Corvallis will most likely take place in August. We do not yet have confirmed dates. Check online for registration forms when they become available, at <http://www.soilfoodweb.com/calendar.html> - or by calling David Kuester at 541-257-2614 - or by email: info@sustainablestudies.org

2. Oregon: October? 2010

Also a tentative scheduling. More details are on the way.

B. Soil Science News

1. Recent overview of global climate science

1. Although not limited to soil science, the debates about global climate trends certainly affect many of us who work with the soil. With that in mind, many Insights readers might be interested in the recent article from The Economist magazine, which presents a remarkably brief and balanced summation of this complex topic: http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15719298

2. Biofuels and food - what is the best mix?

Another subject of debate related to climate change, and one that brings global climate issues closer to home for many farmers, is the rising demand for biofuels. Two recently published studies showcase some of the many conflicting ideas at play.

From one study, researchers conclude that growing food is a more efficient use of most agricultural land. In reaching this conclusion they make a statement that might surprise: "The ideal is to grow corn for food, then leave half the leftover stalks and leaves on the field for soil conservation and produce cellulosic ethanol with the other half."

(source: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/04/100419172855.htm>)

Biofuels and food - what is the best mix? cont'd

The other study reveals a problem with this statement: "Crop residue removal can make no-till soils a source rather than a sink of atmospheric carbon," says [principal author] Blanco, even at rates lower than 50%. Residue removal at rates of less than 25% can cause loss of sediment in runoff relative to soils without residue removal. To avoid the negative impacts on soil, perhaps only a small fraction of residue might be available for removal. This small amount of crop residues is not economically feasible nor logistically possible." (source: <https://www.agronomy.org/news-media/releases/2010/0405/344/>) From this study, the authorial conclusion is to favor biofuel production from crops dedicated to that purpose, and not from removing food crop residues after all.

So, what's the right answer? That's far from obvious, but we have to wonder if these studies gave much thought to the role that the soil microbial communities could play, whether in helping the soil to sequester carbon, helping to prevent soil loss from runoff, or helping both biofuels and food crops to grow more efficiently. ■

III. From Earthfort

A. Solu-Plks is now certified organic!

As expected, we have received confirmation that Solu-Plks is now certified organic by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. We'll be happy to supply copies of the documents to anyone who has already used Solu-Plks, or has been considering it, and is interested in gaining or maintaining their own organic status.

Some of our readers may be asking: "What is Solu-Plks?"

Briefly, it is a nutrient stabilizer. It's designed to make nutrients biologically available to plants

while preventing loss of nutrients through leaching. This helps make any fertility program more efficient. For growers using synthetic chemical fertilizers, Solu-Plks significantly reduces the amount of fertilizer they need to apply. It also promotes the growth of beneficial microorganisms, making an excellent microbial food for use in compost tea brewing.

Because of these qualities, we have been investigating the possibility that Solu-Plks may provide many growers with an ideal "stepping stone" to ease

the transition from "conventional" to organic and agroecological methods.

For more information about Solu-Plks or any of our other products, visit us online at <http://www.earthfort.com> or give us a call at 541-257-2612.

(And in case you were wondering, the name is pronounced "Sol-yoo-pleks.") ■

From all of our staff, happy Earth Day (belatedly), and happy sustainable growing!

