

Soil Foodweb Insights

December 2009

Workshops!

February 15-19 are the dates to remember for the next set of workshops here in Corvallis, Oregon. Registration forms will be available soon. Additional details are available below. For more information or to register, visit the <http://www.soilfoodweb.com/calendar.html> or call David at Sustainable Studies Institute: 541-257-2614.

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I. Soil Foodweb Oregon News

A. Winter testing season begins

As November rolls over to December, you may be wondering how well your soil microbiology is handling the seasonal extremes. Remember there are only three main conditions that make it impractical to conduct soil biology testing:

1. Frozen soil, which some of the northern hemisphere's colder climate zones may experience as the winter season approaches;
2. Standing water, an occasional concern as some of the warmer latitudes enter their wet season, when high rainfall may lead to standing water, especially in soils with a dense compaction zone;
3. Hardened dry soil, which may begin to occur in parts of the southern hemisphere as spring leads into summer.

If you are fortunate enough that none of these three

conditions apply to your soil, its populations of microorganisms can be measured at any Soil Foodweb lab. If you are seeking to mitigate those compaction zones by applying compost, it's wise to verify it has the biology your soil needs. There is still time to benefit from applications of good fungal compost. Let those fungi build the structure required to prevent future compaction zones, and get your soil ready for spring.

The lab locator at www.soilfoodweb.com is designed to help you find the nearest location. Remember, if your country does not have its own lab, Soil Foodweb Oregon is able to receive international samples. (<http://www.oregonfoodweb.com>). Be sure to follow all USDA procedures for secure packaging, and include a copy of our Soil Permit, with any samples from outside the mainland United States.

B. U.S. holiday schedule

Soil Foodweb Oregon's offices and laboratory will remain open during regular business hours throughout the holiday season, except on the following specific dates when the United States Postal Service and other parcel carriers will not be making deliveries:

Christmas Day - Friday 25 December 2009

New Year's Day - Friday 1 January 2009

To everyone celebrating in this season, (going alphabetically by the holidays' names), we wish Happy Chanukah, Merry Christmas, Happy Eid, a Kwanzaa filled with Kuumba (Creativity), a joyful New Year, and/or a sunny Yule (Southern Solstice). If there's anyone we've overlooked, please let us know.

C. Great results in the heartland of maize

Variouly called corn, sweet corn, or maize, the grain now cultivated around the world remains a vital staple crop in Mesoamerica, where it was first domesticated, uncounted centuries ago. This year has been especially difficult for the region's farmers, with conditions extremely dry for the region, leading to many crop failures. But there are signs of hope in the work of Doug Weatherbee, a Soil Foodweb advisor working with growers in Mexico. His initial reports from earlier in the season were already impressive. His photographs clearly illustrate the benefits of a biological approach to soil management (<http://soildoctor.org/?p=10> for more info & pics):



Now that the harvest is in, more photos and important numerical data are becoming available (<http://soildoctor.org?p=310> for more info & pics):



These results will be compiled into a case study to guide future efforts for others hoping to apply and refine his methods. We wanted to give our Insights readers an early look at the possibilities Doug has helped make so clearly visible.

II. Sustainable Studies Institute News

A. Upcoming workshops

Oregon: February 15 - 19

Dr. Elaine Ingham will teach the Introduction to the Soil Foodweb on February 15-16. Matt Slaughter, director of Soil Foodweb Oregon, will teach the Compost Technology class on February 17 and Compost Tea Technology on February 17-18.

Matt will also teach the Light Microscope Methods class, beginning on the afternoon of February 18, to allow the full day of February 19 to serve as a guided hands-on practice session. So, it's even more important than

usual for all students to have their own microscopes, as well as bring along any compost tea or other material they'd like to examine while in class.

These classes will be held in or near Corvallis, Oregon. Details on the location will be included in the confirmation letters for those who register. To register online, visit:

<http://www.soilfoodweb.com/calendar.html>

You can also register by calling David Kuester at Sustainable

Studies Institute: 541-257-2614, or by email: info@sustainablestudies.org

Other workshops

More workshops and classes are in the process of being scheduled for other locations, and for Oregon. If you'd like to see classes in your city or region, let us know! We'll see if we can help you coordinate with others near you to help make it happen. Our main web site at <http://www.soilfoodweb.com> will be updated to reflect each new workshop as it is finalized.

B. Science controversy in the news

As the scientific community debates the meaning of recent events surrounding the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom, some of our readers may wonder what to make of it all. (For those who have not yet heard about it, Wikipedia has a relatively even-handed account of the controversy here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climatic_Research_Unit_email_hacking_incident)

Instead of trying to tell anyone what to believe at this early stage in that controversy, let's bear in mind one simple fact: taking a biological approach

to soil management is a good idea for many reasons, no matter what may happen with global climate trends. While it's certainly true that good soil biology can help reduce the carbon footprint of agriculture, this is just one of the many benefits we are documenting with our ongoing research efforts.

In short, we find ourselves in the fortunate position of being able to carry our work steadily forward, without needing to wait for the results of any contentious political battles over specific climate data. ■

III. From Earthfort

A. Progress report on Project Transcript

Earthfort is still in the process of preparing printed transcripts to accompany Dr. Ingham's audio CDs. The transcript for the Plant Production course was the first to become available. Soon the Turf Systems transcript will see its first printing. The regular price for each will be US\$14.95.

Special offer for newsletter subscribers: the Plant Production transcript will be included, free of charge, with any Plant Production audio CD purchased at its regular price, until the end of December, if ordered from the following link:

<http://www.earthfort.com/store/shopexd.asp?id=44>

(Yes, this is the same special offer we originally said would last to the end of November, but the announcement was not placed very prominently in our last newsletter, so we wanted to give more of our readers a chance to see it.)

From all of our staff, happy sustainable growing! ■ ■ ■