

For soil's sake

World Soil Day on 5 December is an important reminder of our collective responsibility towards soil conservation. By Tanya Ungerer



What keeps soil alive?

The millions of organisms found in soil connect with one another – and with plants and small animals – to form a web of biological activity, which plays a key role in the nutrient cycle.

Why should we care about soil degradation?

A study on nutrients in food has made a sobering revelation: today, we would need to eat eight oranges to get the same amount of vitamin A that was contained in one orange in our grandparents' days. This is due to soil degradation, which is responsible for significant dips in nutrient levels in food (*Scientific American*).

In the US the average mineral content of calcium, magnesium and iron in cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes and spinach reduced by an alarming 80 - 90% between 1914 and 2018 (National Center for Biotechnology Information). And the Food and Agriculture Organization confirms that every year Africa loses 3% of GDP as a result of soil degradation. Soil degradation also causes a loss of between US \$235 billion and \$577 billion in crop productivity every year (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services). As for the



global economy, it will lose US \$23 trillion by 2050 through land degradation (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).

So what can be done?

Relevant parties can advocate for policies across all nations towards soil restoration, and raise awareness of the imminent crisis among 3.5 billion people, to garner their support for these policies.

We need to act now – starting at individual level – by seeking and implementing ways in which we can help conserve our soil. 🍊

This article was adapted from content by www.savesoil.org

More perspective:

- 52% of the world's agricultural soil has already degraded.
- The United States has lost 50% of its topsoil.
- In European agricultural nations, 75 - 85% of soil has less than 2% organic content.
- 62% of India's soil has less than 0.5% organic content.

A teaspoon of soil can contain more organisms than there are humans living on Earth.



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