



The **Global Climate Action Summit** in September will bring leaders and people together from around the world to “Take Ambition to the Next Level.” It will be a moment to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of states, regions, cities, companies, investors and citizens with respect to climate action. It will also be a launchpad for deeper worldwide commitments and accelerated action from countries—supported by all sectors of society—that can put the globe on track to prevent dangerous climate change and realize the historic Paris Agreement.

Underscoring that fact that we need to continue and strengthen all efforts to reduce all GHG emissions, there is growing global recognition that carbon sequestration in natural and working lands is necessary to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. It is well known that changes in agricultural practices can increase the amount of carbon in the soil, improving its fertility and resilience to drought and flood, while raising food production and farm income. France called attention to this opportunity at the Paris climate conference in 2015 with its “[4 per 1000](#)” initiative, and California led the way in the U.S. with its [Healthy Soils Initiative](#). Yet the benefit of rebuilding soil carbon remains little understood by policy makers around the world, and the uptake and replication of these efforts could be greatly improved.

The **Soil Health Challenge**, to be announced at the San Francisco summit by the Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Karen Ross, and diverse representatives from other state and national jurisdictions, will call on national and sub-national governments to promote the development of healthy soils within their own geographies and report back on their progress a year from now at the 2019 UN Climate Summit in New York.

The timeliness and urgency of this challenge could not be clearer: The oceans and atmosphere have become overloaded with carbon dioxide, but the terrestrial ecosystem could absorb much more carbon and benefit from it. In the race to constrain the level of carbon in the atmosphere and hold the rise in global temperatures to well below 2 degrees C, carbon absorption (“negative emissions”) will be required at an unprecedented scale. Agricultural soils could annually take up hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide more than they do today, reducing the level and impact of atmospheric carbon and buying additional time to make the transition to low-carbon solutions throughout the global economy.

Across the globe farmers are beginning to recognize the direct and indirect benefits of climate-smart practices in agriculture, forestry, and grazing. Sustainable farming systems, including agro-ecology practices, that rebuild and protect soil carbon and enhance the vitality of the subsurface microbiome (often recalling traditional practices) – such as minimum or no tillage, rotating crops, keeping the ground covered year-round, agroforestry, etc.– make the land more productive, increase its capacity to absorb and retain water, and thus build resilience to increasingly frequent drought and flood. By restoring degraded lands and increasing crop yields, farmers can increase their incomes, produce the food needed for a growing world population, and eliminate the need to expand into previously protected ecosystems for agriculture.

As governments consider whether – and how – they might strengthen their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change at the 2020 Conference of the Parties, restoring soil health presents a relatively unknown and untapped opportunity. The **Soil Health Challenge** seeks to raise the visibility of that opportunity and encourage public officials to pursue it.



Consistent with the Under2 MOU, and the “4 per 1000” Initiative goals and building on it,

Seeking to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change and the Paris Agreement target of holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels,

Acknowledging that even if the world reaches an emissions trajectory of 80 to 95 percent below 1990 levels by 2050 we will still need to remove carbon from the atmosphere,

Asserting that early adopter public and private stakeholders – including nations, provinces, states, cities, NGOs, and corporations – have led the world in setting ambitious climate targets and taking actions to reduce emissions and protect against climate impacts,

Recognizing that climate change responses and solutions can create economic opportunities and benefits through sustainable development,

Noting the multiple co-benefits of healthy soils and agro-ecology for agricultural yields, food security, farm income, water management, climate resilience, biodiversity, healthy food, and rural community development,

Pledging to share best practices in designing and deploying healthy soils solutions that maximize ecological benefits while providing other co-benefits,

Now at the Global Climate Action Summit in September 2018,

We pledge to work together to:

- (1) Call on and support nations and sub nations in including ambitious programs of action on soil health in their Nationally Determined Contributions submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for the 2020 Conference of the Parties and in sub-national climate initiatives as part of broader climate action plans;
- (2) Enact incentives and programs to promote healthy soils, soil carbon sequestration and enhancement of biodiversity in agricultural areas through a range of actions including policies, supply chain initiatives, regulations, updated farmer education and extension programs, online platforms and in-person events for sharing knowledge and practices, to create an enabling environment for farmers, ranchers and those working to restore degraded lands through agriculture;
- (3) Promote widespread adoption of sustainable farming systems, including agro-ecological and carbon farming practices for agriculture appropriate to diverse geographies and landscapes, based on emerging soil science – including planting cover crops, adopting low- or no-till farming practices, rotational grazing, generation and use of safe compost and/or biochar, crop rotations, nutrient management, silvopasture, agroforestry and other practices – to improve the health and productivity of soils, including their organic carbon content, water retention rate, biological activity, and biological diversity;
- (4) Encourage funders multilateral, bilateral, public, private, philanthropic, etc., to support projects in the field, promotion of good practices, and elaboration and implementation of policies at all level; and
- (5) Report back on our progress at the 2019 Climate Summit at the United Nations in New York.