



**Utah Soil Health Network
On-Farm Trial Participant Feedback Report
End of Year 2
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Introduction

The Utah Soil Health Network (USHN) On-Farm Trial has now completed its third year of the five-year project, and its second year working with on-farm participants. The network team was interested in getting participant feedback on the project at this point to improve the continuing work in the future. Thus, a brief survey of the participants in the USHN was conducted during Fall 2024. Twelve of the 16 participants responded; their data is included in this report. Representative quotes are provided for the dominant themes for each question, and tables with frequencies and means are in the Appendix. We both discuss this year's evaluation and when relevant, compare and contrast the assessment from last year to this year's.

Survey Results

Participants were first asked what they wanted the Soil Health Network Team to know about how the project worked for them (Table 1). The dominant theme was the education received from the project that can be put into soil health practices on the land, noted by six of the 12 (50%), and is reflected in the quotes below:

I feel like I've learned a lot and continuing to learn and find new practices that I can try.

Education has been key so far and look forward to more.

The second common theme was a desire by participants for more and improved communication from the project team (noted by four, 33%--Table 1), both in terms of more educational opportunities but also in terms of seeing results from the data collected, reflected in these representative quotes;

I do wish those in charge of the project would keep in touch better and conduct more workshops or educational events for the participants.

Haven't noticed any results. Would be interested in seeing the data collected.

The request for more communication is consistent with a similar finding in year 1 of the project, as seen in the Table.

An additional four (33%) indicated the project was going good or going great.

Participants were then asked what the Soil Health Network team could do to improve the project for them (the participants). Similar to last year, the majority of responses provided focus on better communication from the project team to the producers (Table 2). Seven producers (58%) indicated in their comments a desire to see improvements that focused on some aspect of communication, as noted in the table and seen in these representative quotes;

Communication is always an important part of any project. It would be great to know what the researchers are seeing on the test plots and have them share their findings with us.

Give more input on what types of crops to plant to make it more feasible.

This theme was the dominant theme under improvements suggested. More individual improvement suggestions are contained in Table 2.

Benefits and Detriments Due to Project Participation

Participants were also asked about the benefits they are seeing from participating in the project thus far (Table 3). Five (42%) participants noted the increase in knowledge/education, as seen in these comments;

Awareness to different type of farming practices that will benefit the farm.

Better knowledge of cover crops and timing.

Three producers (25%) noted they saw improvements in the physical environment on their farm given their project participation, as seen here;

I have definitely noticed an improvement in my water intake by the soil. I believe that can be attributed to the application of the manure/compost as well as the biochar. The plants seem to have a healthier appearance as well.

Better soil health on my property.

Participants were then asked what detriments they were seeing from participating in the project thus far (Table 4). Six (50%) participants noted they had not seen any detriments. The remaining responses were varied with no clear pattern or theme present, as seen in Table 4.

Participants were then provided a series of statements asking their level of agreement on various aspects of the project (Table 5). As the means indicate, participants are happy overall with being involved in the project, with a mean of 4.67, between “agree” and “strongly agreeing” that they would be a part of the project if asked again. Their knowledge about soil health practices has increased since last year, with a mean of 4.42, again between “agree” and “strongly agree”. This mean also had the largest range of responses, from one participant disagreeing to several agreeing. The data shows participants have also been sharing what they have been learning from the project with other farmers/ranchers (with a mean of 4.08) on this statement. Finally, with a mean of 4.50, overall, the participants are satisfied with being a part of the project.

Comparing these means to those from the 2023 evaluation¹, we see that in all the statements participants are moving even more toward agree and strongly agree as they continue in the project, suggesting the project is working well for them.

¹ It is important to note that while the two data sets contain some of the same individuals, we cannot say with certainty what the change per participant was with these statements, but rather, how the means changed with the group.

Lastly, participants were asked if there was anything else they wanted to share with the project team (Table 6). Six participants made specific comments, all contained in Table 6, with a primary focus again on the education they have gained.

Summary

Overall, participants in the USHN are satisfied with the project and happy to be a participant in it. That said, some dominant themes emerged in the data that help point toward areas of improvement that are needed. This primarily focuses on communication, and how it needs to be increased in terms of the amount of communication between participants and the project team, and it also needs to be improved upon (with a focus on both more guidance being given to the participants, but also in terms of providing feedback frequently on the data which has been collected from the participants' fields). This was an issue also noted in last year's evaluation, and the data suggests it has been addressed to some degree, and diminished somewhat in concern to the participants, but more work in this area remains.

It is hoped these survey results provide some helpful information for the project team as they continue to move forward and improve upon the USHN On-Farm Trial.

Appendix

Table 1. What want the soil health network team to know* (Frequency indicating)			
	2023 (n=13)		2024 (n=10)
Need more/improved communication from team (e.g. what should be doing/watching, more direction, contact with team, coordination between all organizations for soil plan, sharing results of year one)	4	We are learning, feel like the educational opportunities are very valuable/opportunity to gain additional knowledge by attending workshops and conferences has been very helpful/education has been key so far/enjoying learning about soil health principles/	6
Working okay so far/still early in process	3	I've learned a lot and continuing to learn and find new practices that I can try/program giving me information about my farm practice that will be a benefit in future farming discussions.	
Changes made are working well (e.g. exceptional crop, cover crop working perfectly)	2	Haven't noticed any results/interested in seeing the data collected/excited to learn from what is being done across state/wish those in charge of project kept in touch better and conduct more workshops or educational events for participants/most interested in outcomes in soil health of test plots versus traditional managed acre.	4
Pleased/informative to have data feedback	2	Going good/great	
Make no till available	1	Still need help with moisture sensors and if overseeding cover crops will be advantageous.	1
Very happy to have access to program's resources and stipend.	1	I appreciate the work that is being done by those involved/direction that has been provided by everyone involved.	1
Training on moisture sensor needed	1		
Learning curve steep	1		

* Some respondents had more than one comment.

Table 2. How to improve the project (frequency indicating) *			
	2023 (n=12)		2024 (n=11)
Provide more guidance via monthly update or meeting	6	More and better communication/keep us updated/ give more input on what types of crops to plant to make it more feasible/be available for question or assistance/share data with us (provide results from test plots)	7
Provide results from data that has been collected	5		
Provide in the field training on using no till drill	1		
Provide links to resources more quickly	1		
		Meet on an annual basis to discuss progress of the soil health plan/maybe 6 month correlation meeting?	2
		Nothing/Doing a great job	2
		Water management and moisture sensor	1

* Some respondents had more than one suggestion.

Table 3. Benefits from participating in project (Frequency indicating)*			
	2023 (n=13)		2024 (n=10)
None yet	6	Awareness to different type of farming practices that will benefit the farm/better knowledge of cover crops and timing/learned beneficial strategies/great soil health education/availability of resources I was not aware of	5
Improvements in soil health	3		
Ability to try new things on soil	2	Better soil health on my property/definitely noticed improvement in water intake by soil/plants have a healthier appearance/benefits from trying to implement soil health principles.	3
Increased knowledge on soil health	1		
Tools provided	1		
		Hard to determine, none yet.	2
		Created awareness in our community.	1
		Networking with other producers	1
		Money helps implement some of the trials	1

* Some respondents had more than one benefit.

	2023 (n=9)		2024 (n=11)
None yet	3	None	6
Difficulty with changes made (e.g. selling alfalfa interseeded with cover crop difficult, production decreases when focus on soil health, Rye cover crop going to seed)	3	Fall interseeding has been a challenge as I have not been able to control the mustard weed in the spring without damaging the fall interseeding/ Timing of the terminate rye has been challenging, it reseeded itself last year but we think we managed to get rid of it this year.	2
Time consuming	2	It was really slow to figure out who and what everyone's part was in the grant and understanding exactly what we needed to do.	1
Complicated to get plan going	1	More effort required to separate ag practices for test plots from surrounding acres.	1
Haven't been able to meet all involved in research	1	Accidentally destroyed soil moisture measuring sensors	1

* Some participants noted more than one detriment.

	2023 (n=14)	2024 (n=12)
If asked again, I would be a part of this project.	4.36	4.67
My knowledge about soil health practices has increased because of my participation in this project.	3.79	4.42
I have been sharing what I have been learning from this project with other farmers/ranchers.	3.71	4.08
Overall, I am satisfied with being a part of this project.	4.00	4.50

* On a scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

Table 6. Anything Else Want to Add (Frequency indicating)			
	2023 (n=5)		2024 (n=6)
Want to meet one on one with someone from research team to go over test results.	1	Again, communication about the results the researchers are seeing as the project moves along would be greatly appreciated as well as continue recommendationsto	1
I look forward to the long-term results from the practices that are being implemented.	1	enhance the projects. I appreciate all of the expertise involved in this proect and the opportunity to be a part of it. Thanks.	
My participation in the project will take the full years to see improvement.	1	Here's hoping that multi-year results will provide better data either good or bad.	1
Because of the drought I picked some dry land to study. If I had it to do over, knowing that we would have some moisture, I would've chosen to do an irrigated project instead.	1	It had been a greart education tool and the staff has been great to work with.	1
Tony Richards is the man.	1	It has been worthwhile and I have learned a few things that I feel like can help me in promving my soil health and even maybe it's a little more money.	1
		Want to continue learning and expecially receiving results from my property.	1
		We appreciate the education, help, recommendations given to improve our farms soil health. We need ongoing education, and specific assistatnce with deficiencies our farm soils have. Learning about and understanding soil testing is critical and how to apply findings physically to our farm.	1