

# National soil collection may unlock mysteries

March 27 2014

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The government has been collecting dirt—lots of it.

Clumps came from the Texas Panhandle, a shady grove in West Virginia, a picked-over corn field in Kansas and thousands of other places in the lower 48.

A small army of researchers and university students scattered across the country for three years to scoop samples into [plastic bags](#) from nearly 5,000 places.

Though always underfoot and often overlooked, dirt actually has a lot to tell. Scientists say information gleaned from it could help farmers grow better vegetables, build a better understanding of [climate change](#) and even solve crimes.

David Smith launched the U.S. Geological Survey project in 2001 and said data about the dirt will feed research for a century, and he's sharing it with anyone who wants it.

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Citation: National soil collection may unlock mysteries (2014, March 27) retrieved 18 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-03-national-soil-mysteries.html>

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