

Farmers and food companies hit the dirt to improve soil health

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Betsy Bower of Ceres Solutions advises a corn farmer in Indiana. Credit: Ceres Solutions

Big food brands, such as Kellogg, Campbell, Mars Wrigley and General Mills, have started investing in their ingredients by helping farmers

improve soil health and sustainability. Not only do these programs enable companies to reach their sustainability targets, they also help farmers cut costs, provide quality crops and improve stewardship of the land, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)*, the weekly news magazine of the American Chemical Society.

Agriculture sustainability programs include consultations with agronomists, on-farm data collection and education. These efforts are fairly new to the [food industry](#), Senior Business Editor Melody Bomgardner writes. The nonprofit company Field to Market created the first commonly used tool for on-farm sustainability about 5 years ago. Currently, few farmers are aware of these new programs, according to a survey conducted by the Environmental Defense Fund. However, the programs are growing in popularity as food companies and farmers work together to decrease [greenhouse gas emissions](#), water use and the overall environmental impact of farming, while also cutting farmers' costs and maintaining their stewardship of the land.

Solutions to improving soil health are unique to each farm, and although new tools are being developed, none can currently take a farm's data and provide specific solutions. However, farmers can take advantage of cost-sharing programs that allow them to install drip irrigation, try organic production or plant cover crops. They can select strategies to reduce the use of synthetic nitrogen, such as less tillage or a microbial soil enhancement product. The programs are focused on education and data gathering, but it is unclear if the initiatives will actually have an impact on sustainable farming, experts say.

More information: Melody Bomgardner. *C&EN*. The newest food trend is in the ground: Food companies' sustainability goals hinge on soil health. Volume 97, Issue 21 , cen.acs.org/business/agriculture/trend-ground/97/i21

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