

Educate, demonstrate, activate.

When it comes to soil health, “educate, demonstrate and activate” could be the mantra of the Ocean County Soil Conservation District in New Jersey. District programs reach audiences ranging from contractors and architects to teachers, students, gardeners and the general public.

The district is located on the coastal plain of New Jersey which follows the contours of the Barnegat Bay watershed. Ocean County is a rapidly urbanizing area. All the more reason to preach soil health, said District Administrator Christine Raabe. “We have a long history of supporting soil health initiatives across the county,” she said.

Here’s a sample of the district’s many projects:

- Restoring soil function in storm water basins in partnership with county departments and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).
- Hosting soil health conferences geared toward urbanizing audiences with partners from the business community, Rutgers University, NRCS and other groups. One conference was also co-hosted by the neighboring Burlington County Soil Conservation District.
- Hosting monthly programs on different aspects of soil health in honor of this year’s designation as the International Year of Soils.
- Cooperating with other partners on a Soil Health Improvement Project at Jakes Branch County Park. The project’s goals were to research, demonstrate and educate. It included demonstrations of low-cost and practical soil restoration techniques, turf improvement and best management practices. The Barnegat Bay Partnership provided funding through an Environmental Protection Agency grant.
- Hosting an Environmental Educators Roundtable for 18 years. The roundtable offers an array of workshops and activities for 100 or so educators who attend each year. It has also yielded an extensive list of soil health resources on the district’s web site, www.soildistrict.org.



A crowd gathers at an Ocean County Soil Conservation District event to view a demonstration of a rotary aerator that decompacts soil. Compacted soils lead to storm-water runoff in urbanizing areas.

- Developing a New Jersey Soil Health Assessment Guide in cooperation with NRCS Soil Health Specialist Eileen Miller.

“We have a lot of work to do, and it won’t end,” Raabe said. “One of the most important messages is to encourage a connection with the water cycle and soil – let the water stay where it falls.”

For more information on the district’s activities, visit its web site (<http://www.soildistrict.org/>). Also, Raabe and Miller were featured on an NACD Urban and Community webinar, which can be accessed at www.nacdnet.org/policy/urban/webinars.



Teachers experiment with sediment samples at the 18th annual Environmental Educators Roundtable sponsored by the Ocean County Soil Conservation District in New Jersey.