

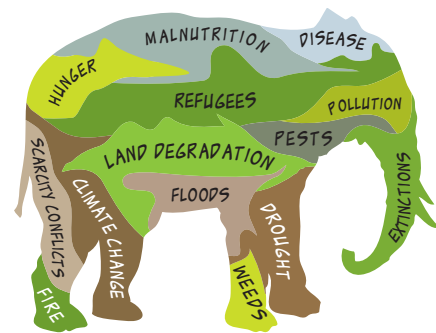
A stamp for soil health

Soil health—the sticky texture and porous crumb-like structure of productive topsoil—can be broadly defined as the ability of soil to absorb and retain water, provide habitat for microbes, and support abundant and diverse growth of plants, which in turn feed the living processes of soil formation and development. These living processes of soil health, driven by sunlight, are the invisible foundation of our economies, our nation, our civilization.

Several civilizations before ours have collapsed when these processes and cycles lost function. What we recognize, often belatedly, are the symptoms: erosion, blowing dust, rising costs of crop production, nutrient runoff and leaching, above-ground losses of biodiversity, malnutrition, increased flooding and drought. Since the 1930s, American governments, research institutions, and organizations have spent trillions battling against these symptoms.

Around our country, some enterprising and creative farmers and land managers have been turning this war inside out, learning how to work *with* nature's powerful cycles and processes. They are figuring out how to grow food and fiber while restoring the complex, overlapping communities of self-motivated living organisms that support and sustain soil health—the fundamental but hidden infrastructure of our civilization. They are doing this because they have sensed—through failure, experimentation, and close observation—that it's possible and practical.

In previous generations, a few had glimpsed this possibility, but recognition of it failed to spread. Today the United States has a better opportunity to restore soil health and set a policy course with a participatory, local, evidence-based process of learning and discovery. We propose a **Soil Health Stamp**, a semipostal or surcharged First Class stamp for soil health, to help fund bottom-up initiatives for soil health in conservation districts across the country.



A focus on symptoms camouflages the whole. Eisenhower suggested, “when a problem can’t be solved, enlarge it.” **NOTE:** This picture is **NOT** a suggestion for the stamp art or design. When the stamp is approved, a design contest could be held.

Scaffolding, proof of concept, and technical and social supports already exist: the Soil Health Champions network of the National Association of Conservation Districts, the soil health initiatives of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the adaptable soil health monitoring framework and Soil Carbon Challenge of the Soil Carbon Coalition. A Soil Health stamp will enable individuals to participate in, and show their support for, grassroots efforts to enlist the creativity and commitment of farmers, ranchers, and land managers toward enhancing (and in some cases rebuilding) our nation's fundamental infrastructure—spongy, life-filled, water-holding, water-filtering soil.

This is anything but a narrow or special interest. As soil health—and our human responsibility for this foundation of civilization—emerges again into more general awareness, let's take the opportunity to grow and broaden a place-based, people-centered knowhow.

Proposal

That funds from the Soil Health stamp be allotted yearly to the National Association of Conservation Districts, either directly or if necessary through an Executive Agency such as NRCS, and that NACD establish a grant program, taking applications from interested districts or district associations for soil health efforts that are open and participatory, building on some local assets and examples, and that include some practical and repeatable monitoring of soil function over time.

Draft House bill below. Suggestions welcome. (NOTE: the elephant diagram above is NOT a proposal for stamp art or design, which could come later.)

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115th CONGRESS
1st Session

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 5, 2017

A **(DRAFT)** BILL

To provide for the issuance of a Soil Health Semipostal Stamp.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

1. Short title

This Act may be cited as the “Soil Health Semipostal Stamp Act.”

2. Soil Health Semipostal Stamp

(a) In General.—In order to afford a convenient way for members of the public to participate and contribute to funding for recognition and promotion of soil health—the foundation of our economy and civilization—in and by conservation districts, the United States Postal Service shall issue a semipostal stamp (hereinafter in this Act referred to as the “Soil Health Semipostal Stamp”) in accordance with succeeding provisions of this section.

(b) Cost and Use.—

(1) In general.—The Soil Health Semipostal Stamp shall be offered at a cost equal to the cost of mailing a letter weighing 1 ounce or less at the nonautomation single-piece first-ounce letter rate, in effect at the time of purchase, plus a differential of not less than 15 percent.

(2) Voluntary use.—The use of any semipostal issued under this section shall be voluntary on the part of postal patrons.

(3) Special rate.—The special rate of postage of an individual stamp under this section shall be an amount that is evenly divisible by 5.

(c) Other Terms and Conditions.—The issuance and sale of the Soil Health Semipostal Stamp shall be governed by the provisions of section 416 of title 39, United States Code, and regulations issued under such section, subject to subsection (b) and the following:

(1) Disposition of proceeds.—

- (A) In general.—All amounts becoming available from the sale of the Soil Health Semipostal Stamp (as determined under section 416(d) of such title 39) shall be transferred to the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture, and from there to the National Association of Conservation Districts, for the purpose described in subsection (a), through payments which shall be made once a year, to fund a program of Soil Health grants to districts and district associations.
- (B) Proceeds not to be offset.—In accordance with section 416(d)(4) of such title 39, amounts becoming available from the sale of the Soil Health Semipostal Stamp (as so determined) shall not be taken into account in any decision relating to the level of appropriations or other Federal funding to be furnished in any year to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- (2) Duration.—The Soil Health Semipostal Stamp shall be made available to the public for a period of at least 6 years, beginning no later than 12 months after the date of the enactment of this Act.
- (3) Limitation.—The Soil Health Semipostal Stamp shall not be subject to, or taken into account for purposes of applying, any limitation under section 416(e)(1)(C) of such title 39.
- (d) Definition.—For purposes of this Act, the term “semipostal stamp” refers to a stamp described in section 416(a)(1) of title 39, United States Code.