



102ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

2021 and 2022

HB5224

Introduced 1/31/2022, by Rep. Sonya M. Harper

SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

New Act

Creates the Healthy Soil Act. Creates the Healthy Soil Program to be administered by the Department of Agriculture with the purpose of promoting and supporting farming and ranching systems and other forms of land management that increase soil organic matter, aggregate stability, microbiology, and water retention to improve health, yield, and profitability of the soils in the State. Provides that the Healthy Soil Program shall be composed of a healthy soil assessment and education program, a healthy soil grants program, and other programs established by the Department to accomplish the purposes of the Act. Sets forth requirements of the Department in administering the Program. Provides for use of funds appropriated to the Department to administer the Program.

LRB102 25504 NLB 34792 b

1 AN ACT concerning agriculture.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the
5 Healthy Soil Act.

6 Section 5. Definitions. As used in this Act:

7 "Champion" means a land manager that is declared a soil
8 health champion due to the land manager's excellence in
9 applying and promoting soil health principles, as modeled by
10 the soil health champion program of the national association
11 of conservation districts.

12 "Department" means the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

13 "Eligible entity" means an entity with proven land
14 management capacity to support healthy soil.

15 "Healthy soil" means soil that enhances its continuing
16 capacity to function as a biological system, increases its
17 organic matter, and improves its structure and water-holding
18 and nutrient-holding capacity.

19 "Program" means the Healthy Soil Program created by this
20 Act.

21 "Soil health principle" means a principle that promotes
22 soil health in a given environment and includes:

23 (1) keeping soil covered;

1 (2) minimizing soil disturbance on cropland and
2 minimizing external inputs;

3 (3) maximizing biodiversity;

4 (4) maintaining a living root; and

5 (5) integrating animals into land management,
6 including grazing animals, birds, beneficial insects, or
7 keystone species such as earthworms.

8 "Supported method" means a method that is based upon soil
9 health principles and is scientifically supported to promote
10 healthy soil.

11 "Technical assistance" means assistance provided to a
12 farmer or rancher to achieve the purpose of this Act and
13 includes outreach, education, financial assistance, and
14 assistance with project planning, project design, grant
15 applications, project implementation, or project reporting.

16 "Technical assistance provider" means a local, State,
17 federal, tribal, or educational entity with demonstrated
18 technical expertise in designing and implementing agricultural
19 management practices that contribute to healthy soils.

20 Section 10. Healthy Soil Program created; purpose.

21 (a) The Healthy Soil Program is created in the Department.
22 The Department shall administer the Program.

23 (b) The Purpose of the Program is to promote and support
24 farming and ranching systems and other forms of land
25 management that increase soil organic matter, aggregate

1 stability, microbiology, and water retention to improve the
2 health, yield, and profitability of the soils of the State.

3 Section 15. Soil assessment and education; grants;
4 Department duties.

5 (a) The Program shall be composed of:

6 (1) a healthy soil assessment and education program;

7 (2) a healthy soil grants program; and

8 (3) other programs established by the Department to
9 accomplish the purposes of this Act.

10 (b) In administering the healthy soil assessment and
11 education program, the Department shall:

12 (1) work through technical assistance providers or
13 eligible entities to:

14 (A) encourage farmers, ranchers, and land managers
15 to undertake voluntary soil health measurements;

16 (B) raise awareness about desirable soil health
17 characteristics;

18 (C) facilitate on-site, producer-led workshops and
19 training sessions to promote and engender soil health
20 stewardship; and

21 (D) complete a baseline soil health assessment by
22 testing the organic matter, water infiltration rate,
23 microbiology, and aggregate stability of soils, in
24 addition to analyzing phospholipids and monitoring
25 soil cover;

1 (2) establish a statewide network of champions to
2 promote soil health stewardship, offer guidance to
3 producers and land managers, and encourage teamwork;

4 (3) create a program to provide ongoing training in
5 soil health stewardship and workshop facilitation for
6 champions and eligible entities;

7 (4) in collaboration with technical assistance
8 providers, sponsor soil health workshops and training
9 sessions at research centers and learning sites throughout
10 the State; and

11 (5) educate students and the public about the
12 importance of soil health stewardship.

13 (c) In administering the healthy soil grant program, the
14 Department shall:

15 (1) award grants to eligible entities to provide
16 technical assistance to producers and land managers in
17 advancing soil health principles and implementing
18 supported methods;

19 (2) develop a user-friendly grant program application
20 and application and reporting processes;

21 (3) develop criteria for the award of grants, under
22 which grants shall be awarded equitably and priority may
23 be given to eligible entities serving young producers,
24 veterans, and small farms or ranches, or to projects that
25 benefit economically or socially disadvantaged
26 communities; and

1 (4) ensure that grant funds are used only to advance
2 soil health and soil health stewardship.

3 (d) The Department shall encourage producer, land manager,
4 landowner, and interagency collaboration in the management of
5 healthy soils and shall:

6 (1) work with technical assistance providers to
7 advance soil health stewardship across private, State, and
8 federal lands by fostering collaboration among producers,
9 land managers, and landowners; and

10 (2) conduct outreach to producers and land managers to
11 promote the Program and other federal, State, or local
12 grant opportunities that support and promote healthy
13 soils.

14 (e) In administering the Program, the Department shall
15 support local economic growth in the State and shall:

16 (1) identify ways to increase the generation and use
17 of compost to build healthy soils;

18 (2) to the extent permitted by the Procurement Code,
19 prioritize in-State sourcing of the resources needed for
20 the Program, including testing resources, compost, seeds,
21 fencing supplies, and equipment; and

22 (3) support the emerging market for food grown in the
23 State under management for healthy soils.

24 (f) The Department may adopt rules to implement this Act.

25 Section 20. Use of appropriated funds. Funds appropriated

1 to the Department to administer the Program may be used for:

2 (a) the healthy soil grant program;

3 (b) the healthy soil assessment and education program;

4 (c) promotion and outreach;

5 (d) Department staffing support;

6 (e) capacity building for eligible entities;

7 (f) soil health research;

8 (g) travel and reimbursement of other expenses in
9 accordance with applicable law; and

10 (h) other expenditures as determined by the Department to
11 be necessary to support the overall effective administration
12 of the Program.