

Soil Health Case Study Tool Kit:

Case Study Introduction and Consent Form for Producers – AFT Example

Updated: May 2024

Thank you for considering participating as a “soil health successful” producer!

Introduction: American Farmland Trust (AFT) developed the Row Crop and Tree Nut Retrospective Soil Health Economic Calculator (R-SHEC) Tools (Excel), Questionnaires (Word), and additional Tool Kit materials, known as the Soil Health Case Study Tool Kit, for a 2018 USDA Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), and has continued to develop and expand the Tool Kit. Using this Tool Kit, AFT has published several retrospective [Soil Health Case Studies](#) (co-branded with NRCS) featuring row crop farmers and almond growers that provide economic and environmental evidence that these soil health practices really work. Please review these case studies on our website.

The R-SHEC Tool is an Excel-based partial budget analysis calculator that quantifies the benefits and costs experienced by “soil health successful” row crop farmers or tree nut producers. Producer-provided economic data is collected through interviews with the farmer using the R-SHEC Questionnaire and input into the calculator, which uses default national average prices or user-inputted prices.

Our criteria to participate as a “soil health successful” producer to be featured in a two-page case study includes:

- Growing certain row crops (barley, canola, corn grain, corn silage, ensilage, forage, flaxseed, grain sorghum, hay, mustard seed, oats, rapeseed, rye, safflower, sugar beets, sunflower seed, soybeans, triticale, and wheat) or tree nuts (almonds, pistachios, and/or walnuts)
- Having adopted no-till or reduced tillage, cover crops, and/or nutrient management, or a conservation crop rotation (i.e., diversification of crop rotation for soil health) within a row crop system; or having adopted cover crops or conservation cover, nutrient management, mulching, and/or compost application within a tree nut orchard
- Using one or more of these soil health practices (listed above) on most of their farm for 4 to 15 years (practices used for longer than 15 years are considered baseline rather than a change in operation and are, therefore, not appropriate for a partial budget analysis)
- Specific to tree nut growers, their trees must have been at least five to seven years old (i.e., full-bearing age) BEFORE the grower adopted these soil health practices in order to distinguish between natural tree growth and soil health practice benefits
- Having positive outcomes they wish to share that are directly associated with their adopted soil health practices

During the interview, we will ask you to:

- Select a Study Area that best represents your most robust and positive soil health practice implementation experience; this could be your entire operation or a portion of it
- Tell us how you grow your crops now after adopting the soil health practice(s) and how you grew them before you used the soil health practice(s) within the Study Area
- Describe how you transitioned from conventional management practices to soil health practices

- Tell us about the quantitative and qualitative benefits and costs you have experienced due to the soil health practice(s)
 - **By soil health practice, we will ask for changes in:** establishment machinery strategy/costs, nutrient application strategy/products/costs, pesticide strategy/products/costs, average erosion rate and repair, average yield, and open-ended “other” items (e.g. increased soil sampling costs, consultant fees, etc.)
- Share information about the quantitative or qualitative changes in your soil (e.g., soil sampling results or visual observations in your soil) and erosion loss or water runoff that you’ve observed due to the soil health practice(s)
- Provide us with pictures of yourself and the farm for the case study publication or allow us to take a few photos.

Amount of time the project should take: AFT estimates that over the course of two to six months, **about 6 to 10 hours** of engagement (including a combination of in-person visits, virtual meetings, emails, or phone calls) with the producer may be needed, including:

- An initial half-hour conversation to determine if you satisfy the criteria described above using the “Pre-Interview Form” (or section one of the full R-SHEC Questionnaire)
- About 4-6 hours will be needed to conduct the “R-SHEC Questionnaire” interview, likely broken up across several interviews over the course of a few months
- Producers should expect to receive follow-up inquiries to clarify details
- An hour or so will be needed to share the results and obtain your review and approval of the case study
- You will be asked to read over the full case study prior to publication and provide corrections if needed prior to approving it

Please have ready for sharing (if possible) for the interview:

- Crop production and management data for the Study Area for you to reference when detailing the change in costs and benefits before and after soil health practice adoption

How sharing your story will benefit you and other farmers:

- Much of the evidence about the benefits of soil health practices is anecdotal. We hope your quantitative data that we analyze provides the much sought-after proof that these practices really work. We hope these case studies help convince other farmers in your area to adopt soil health practices.
- We hope that your participation in this project—as a leader in the soil health movement—brings you pride and pleasure, as you share your success story with others.
- We hope that you find value in our collaboration to quantify your net economic outcomes due to the soil health practice(s). For example, you might find your case study a useful tool when discussing conservation topics with your family, neighbors, landlords, bankers, insurance agents, or representatives from corporations with sustainability supply chain goals.

CONSENT FORM

As a featured “Soil Health Successful” Producer participating in this AFT project:

- I understand that the data I share will only be used to produce my case study and related reports. I have seen the two-page AFT-NRCS Retrospective Economic and Environmental Soil Health Case Studies. I understand that AFT expects me to read and reflect on the case studies. I understand that AFT is using those case studies as a template for the case study about me and that in addition to my economic outcomes attributable to my soil health practice(s), AFT will quantify my water quality and climate outcomes too. AFT may also use my data to produce summary reports of the project. Any additional uses of the data I provide will require AFT to ask for additional permission.
- I agree to be interviewed about my soil health and farming practices and the economic impacts that I’ve observed due to use of soil health practice(s). I understand that quotes of things I say in this interview can be used, edited for brevity, and published in a short case study. I understand that I have the option to provide the price at which I sold my crop but that national average crop prices can be used instead. I understand that before the case study about me is published, I will be given the opportunity to review and edit out any information I may deem inappropriate to share.
- I agree to be tape recorded as I understand that will help my interviewer remember details that they were unable to write down.
- I agree to give permission to view, record, and analyze my farm maps, farm records, and soil test records to AFT, as needed for my case study.
- I understand that only my county and topographic conditions will be described in the case study while my address and contact information will not be shared.
- I acknowledge that AFT is going to publicly share the findings from these case studies. I agree to have my picture taken or share existing photos of me that will be published in the case study. I understand that the case study will be distributed widely, e.g., at conferences in presentations and via project websites.
- I can at any time withdraw consent from the project

Address: _____ Name of Farmer and Farm: _____

Phone number: _____ Signature: _____

Email: _____ Date: _____