



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Episode 372: Digging into Healthy Soil with Dr. Faye Smith

In this episode, NCAT Sustainable Agriculture Specialist Nina Prater is joined by Dr. Faye Smith, a soil scientist with a focus on sustainable soil and landscape management. They get down and dirty with the importance of soil health, science-backed approaches to soil health, important benchmarks for measuring soil health, and more about the substance that's the basis of agriculture.



NEW NCAT VIDEO

[From Farm to Market: The Organic Advantage](#)

Behind the Certified Organic label is an approach to farming that prioritizes care for the land and for the people who grow and eat the food. From Farm to Market: The Organic Advantage is a short documentary in which we interviewed select successful and experienced organic farmers throughout the United States to understand the economic, social, and cultural impact of the USDA Organic standard on certified organic farms. NCAT staff conducted long-form interviews with organic farmers over the course of 2024, and this 12-minute video highlights of some of the major themes uncovered during the interview process. The video touches on topics like impact on employees, respect for workers, history of the organic standard, profitability, access to markets, and the benefits of organic production on the farm lifestyle.



FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

[Farm Credit East Farmers Market Grants](#)

Farm Credit East is offering eligible farmers markets in eight Northeast states grants up to \$500 to support participating farmers, market enhancements, marketing efforts, and/or programs to support disadvantaged communities or improve access to fresh, local food.

Applications are due by May 15, 2025.

[Utah Food Security Grant](#)

This reimbursement grant is open to processors located in Utah with fewer than 100 employees who plan

to make an immediate impact on the state's capacity to process or store Utah-raised or -grown products. Applications are due by June 8, 2025.

Minnesota's Developing Markets for Continuous Living Cover Grants

Proposals must aim to develop and accelerate enterprises, supply chains, and markets for continuous living cover crops and cropping systems in the early stages of commercial development in Minnesota. Applications must be received by July 9, 2025.

DON'T MISS IT

Second International Symposium on Elderberry.

June 18-20, 2025

Columbia, Missouri

Scientists, farmers, processors, and elderberry visionaries from around the world will gather for an Elderberry Symposium that transcends borders, disciplines, and perspectives. The event includes farm tours, conference sessions, a poster session, and a trade show.

Joint Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Food and Society and the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society

June 18-21, 2025

Corvallis, Oregon

The conference theme is "Food Cultures and Social Justice." Share food and participate in conversations aimed at cultivating equitable and environmentally sound food and agricultural systems.

Farm & Food Celebration

June 13, 2025

Grinnell, Iowa

This event will feature farm tours, local eats, and Iowa's food systems. Learn from local farmers and food businesses and engage with food system practitioners, early care providers, and other food-system organizations.

FROM OUR LIBRARY

It's Strawberry Season!

Strawberry season is one of the best parts of late spring/early summer, in our humble opinion! Whether you go to a pick-your-own berry farm or are lucky enough to grab them before they sell out at the farmers market, strawberries are in high demand when they are at their peak. Want to become the most popular booth at the farmers market? Learn how to grow organic strawberries with our free publication, [Strawberries: Organic Production](#).



IN THE NEWS

- **Video Series to Train California Workers for Specialty Crops**

A team of educators from California universities and colleges is producing a 25-part video series to help [train new people to work with California's specialty crops](#). The video curriculum series will address topics such as integrated weed management, postharvest technology, crop breeding, microgreen production, soil management, labor, and specialized farm machinery. The first video, "Contemporary and future approaches to plant breeding," is available free, online, and new titles will become available weekly.

- **Less-intensive Management Boosts Soil Health**

Soils research published in the journal *Science* by the Netherlands Institute of Ecology showed that the [less intensively you manage the soil, the better the soil can function](#). This study found that it is mainly the intensity of tillage that determines whether the soil can retain all its functions, across both organic and conventional farming systems. Management practices such as plowing less and using cover crops that contain a mixture of grasses and legumes helped promote a fully functioning soil.

Related ATTRA publication: [Reducing Tillage Intensity in Organic Production Systems](#)

- **Organic Market Report Highlights Industry Growth**

The [2025 Organic Market Report](#) released by the Organic Trade Association says that U.S. sales of certified organic products accelerated in 2024 with an annual growth rate of 5.2%, while sales for organic reached a new high of \$71.6 billion. Organic produce was the primary entry point for consumers into the organic market, representing 30.1% of total organic sales at \$21.5 billion. Berries, new apple varieties, and tropical fruits showed particularly strong growth, as did organic beverages,

dairy, and eggs.

- **[Aridification Threatens Agriculture and Water Systems](#)**

Aridification, a long-term drying trend resulting in a permanent reduction in water availability, has [serious implications for global agriculture and water systems](#), according to a study published in *Nature Water*. The international research team helped identify strategies that policy-makers and farmers could adopt to deal with less agricultural water, such as smarter irrigation, better monitoring through data analytics, drought-tolerant crops, and restoration of degraded land to retain more water.

Related ATTRA publication: [Managing Soils for Water: How Five Principles of Soil Health Support Water Infiltration and Storage](#)

- **[Flower Strips Lower Cost of Orchard Pest Control in UK Study](#)**

Results of a study at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom highlighted the economic benefits of [planting flower strips in apple orchards to attract beneficial insects](#) that prey on pests. The researchers tested different locations for the flower strips, and they found that putting flowers in the right place was more effective at boosting orchard profits than other factors. Researchers noted that in addition to the contribution flower strips made to pest control, they also supported pollinating insects, captured carbon, and helped improve the overall health of the farm environment.

MORE NEWS

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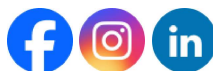
NCAT has been helping people build resilient communities through local and sustainable solutions that reduce poverty, strengthen self-reliance, and protect natural resources since 1976. Learn more and become a friend of NCAT at [NCAT.ORG](#).

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