

Healthy Soil Healthy Life

Impact Assessment Soil Health Law

The European Compost Network (ECN) welcomes the call for evidence of the European Commission for the impact assessment of the Soil Health Law. ECN partners, more than 4500 experts and plant operators across the EU, Switzerland, UK and Norway with more than 45 million tonnes (Mt) of biological waste treatment capacity of biowaste for producing high quality compost and digestates, are very supportive of **harmonised European legislation for soil protection and health**.

ECN is promoting soil health since 2018 when it started the international campaign initiative S.O.S. Save Organics in Soil, with the Italian Composting Association (CIC). ECN reiterates its support for establishing EU Common indicators and certification for soil health.

Compost and digestate (C&D) are two organic recycled materials that are used as organic fertilisers and **soil improvers** in agriculture and horticulture, or as peat replacements in growing media production. In 2017, 15.8 Mt of C&D from bio-waste (BW) recycling were manufactured in 18 countries¹. As Member States must introduce BW separate collection at the latest on 31st December 2023, C&D figures are set to grow.

Providing stable organic carbon with C&D helps to maintain and in replenish the content of **soil organic matter**. This recycled organic matter delivers a substrate for a diverse range of micro-organisms that form an essential part of a healthy soil ecosystem.

Degraded Soil that are low in organic matter are less productive, retain less water and store less carbon. Soils with low levels of **organic matter** can be improved by regular applications of quality C&D. More available quality C&D and their correct use in agriculture **will reduce** the need for mineral **nutrients** for basic fertilisation; considering the specific soil and climate conditions and the nutrient efficiency, nutrient losses can be reduced.

Conclusions

The European Commission should acknowledge the important climate and environmental benefits that regular applications of quality compost and digestate to soil generate. We propose that the Soil Health Law (and therefore the CAP) should include a mechanism to encourage Member States to reward the use of compost and digestate and close the biological cycle in accordance with circular economy principles.

¹ ECN Status Report 2019 European Bio-waste Management – a status summary of European countries and their management of bio-waste towards compost and digestate (2019). [Link](#)

The application of compost or digestate should follow good agricultural practices, since the main goal of any soil protection policy should be to restore health and fertility. In this respect, the conditions for application (period, doses, farming techniques) should be based on the actual requirements of the specific crops and the benefit to the soil and regional climate. Any practice that only aims at increasing carbon or organic matter levels in soils, disregarding soil use, should be discouraged

Member States should agree on monitoring, reporting, and verification rules and procedures that could allow soil health certificates to be issued to farmers and landowners.

Incentives should include appropriate training to farmers on the long-term benefits of soil health and the practical ways of assessing its quality. Since soil improvers do not work in the same way of mineral fertilisers, farmers need advice to evaluate their compost requirements, when it should be spread, and how they can forecast the expected results. Many farmers will gain from agronomic training and advice from experts.

Protecting soil and its fertility requires long term interventions. Any policy protecting and improving soil and biodiversity should forecast long term programs coupled with appropriate rewards and incentive instruments. The benefits of the regular application of high-quality compost and digestate to soils usually arise and become clear and measurable after five years.

About the European Compost Network (ECN)

The **European Compost Network** (ECN) is the leading European membership organisation promoting sustainable recycling practices by composting and anaerobic digestion of organic resources and guarding over the quality and safe use of the recovered organic fertilisers and soil improvers. With 68 members from 27 European Countries ECN represents more than 4500 experts and plant operators with more than 45 million tonnes of biological waste treatment capacity.