



Robert Bentley
Governor

Stephen M. Cauthen
Director, SWCC

STATE OF ALABAMA
**SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

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August 28, 2014

Commissioner John McMillan
Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries
1445 Federal Drive
Montgomery, Alabama 36107

RE: Report of the Soil and Water Conservation Working (SWCW) Group

Dear Commissioner McMillan:

Which farm is the most productive, the one with healthy soil or the one with unhealthy soil? The SWCW Group believes that the farm with healthy soil is the best characteristic of a productive farm. Healthy soil increases production and the best management practice to increase production and maintain healthy soil is through Conservation Agriculture.

Demographers estimate that the world's population will grow from seven billion today, to more than nine billion in 2050. To clothe and feed this growing population farmers will need to produce as much food and fiber in the next 40 years as they have in the last 500. The resource that is the foundation of sustainable agriculture is the soil itself. Crop yields on eroded soil are lower than those on protected soils because erosion reduces soil fertility and water availability.

Furthermore, it is well documented that soil with higher organic matter content absorbs and retains moisture, are more productive, and requires less inputs than soil with lower organic matter content. There currently exists an infrastructure partnership between and among federal and state agencies and the farm producer to deliver conservation agriculture practices for the growing agriculture needs.

SWCW Group recommends the following:

1. Increase funding to the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee (SWCC) an additional \$15,000,000.00, over a three year period, with a landowner producer match of \$15,000,000.00.

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2. Comprehensive and shared research for conservation agriculture between Land Grant Universities, SWCC, and the Alabama Natural Resource Conservation Service- an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, should be organized for the purpose of addressing Alabama's environmental and economic benefits through conservation agriculture practices.

3. The development and implementation of a program to increase the organic matter content of Alabama soils. This plan should include, but not be limited to, the use of municipal biosolids in combination with wood residues, certain industrial wastes, hay, and agricultural residues such as cotton gin trash and corn stover.

Conclusion: Every conservation practice has an environmental and economic impact. These recommendations are the beginnings of an initiative in Alabama that should be titled "Conservation Grows Jobs."

Sincerely,

Stephen M. Cauthen
Executive Director