Soil health is the very foundation of our food systems and provides several vital ecosystem services, including land productivity, flood regulation, nutrient cycling, and carbon sequestration. Healthy soil is critical for increasing food and nutrition security, improving livelihoods, reaching climate change mitigation and adaptation goals, enhancing above and below ground biodiversity, restoring ecosystems and providing many other benefits for people.

Yet today’s soils face an unprecedented crisis. Over 40% of the Earth surface is degraded, negatively affecting over 3.2 billion people. Continuing business as usual is no longer an option if both people and the planet are to thrive.

Globally we are at a crossroad. We need to ensure the pathway for achieving soil health addresses the critical economic, structural, and technical capacity barriers that prevent farmers and land managers from accessing finance, productive inputs and information that enhance the scaling of healthy soil practices that improve ecosystem function agricultural, rangeland, wetland and forest systems.

Rooted in the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, and anchored in the UNCCD, as a result of the glaring need for a focus on soils as part of food system transformation, CA4SH aims to guide and catalyse public and market-based private sector investments in soil health as a foundational and proactive response for addressing food and nutrition security, climate change, socioeconomic returns and growth, productivity, rural livelihoods, biodiversity, climate and nature.

The main objective of the Coalition of Action 4 Soil Health (CA4SH) is to improve soil health globally by addressing critical implementation, monitoring, policy, and public and private investment barriers that constrain farmers from adopting and scaling healthy soil practices.

Why achieving soil health is so critical

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A focus on soil as a unifier across the complex and inter-related global challenges of food and nutrition security, poverty reduction, climate change and biodiversity loss.

Championing the business case for private investment in soil as a capital asset, and alternative to the current limited number of commodity-focused investments (e.g., coffee, cocoa, palm oil).

Alignment of multiple public and private stakeholders to address the soil health investment gap and incentivize and reward farmers implementing actions to enhance soil health.

Adopting a systemic approach to improving soil health aimed at simultaneously delivering co-benefits to production, the environment, climate change resilience and mitigation, and the economy.

Alignment of grower, investor, financial markets and other key stakeholders along value chains, to collectively address social, economic and technical barriers experienced by farmers in adopting healthy soil practices.

Shift from contextualized, actions to enhance soil health, to evidence-based outcomes delivered by non-prescriptive agronomic management approaches.

The goals of the Coalition include:

- Integrate soil health considerations in policy across the development, environment, and climate change domains, and along value chains.
- Expand on research in development into soil health practices, monitoring and evaluation, and financial tools and mechanisms.
- Significantly increase the number of hectares of land under improved practices for soil health.
- Significantly increase investments in soil health, by a margin of 5-10 fold above current financing commitments.

CA4SH brings several new dimensions to the efforts to enhance soil health across landscapes:

- Top-soil is being lost at a rate of around 75 billion tons annually, soil carbon stocks are depleted by around 40%-60%, resulting in USD $400 billion in lost agriculture production.

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The Coalition of Action 4 Soil Health (CA4SH) is a global initiative that brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to address the pressing issue of declining soil health. The coalition aims to drive action and investment in soil health, focusing on the need to enhance soil health as a unifier across the complex and inter-related global challenges of food and nutrition security, poverty reduction, climate change and biodiversity loss.

Through a systemic approach, CA4SH seeks to improve soil health practices, incentivize and reward farmers implementing actions to enhance soil health, and collectively address social, economic and technical barriers experienced by farmers in adopting healthy soil practices. The coalition is dedicated to shifting from contextualized actions to evidence-based outcomes delivered by non-prescriptive agronomic management approaches.

CA4SH aims to integrate soil health considerations in policy across the development, environment, and climate change domains, and along value chains. It seeks to expand on research in development into soil health practices, monitoring and evaluation, and financial tools and mechanisms. The coalition also aims to significantly increase the number of hectares of land under improved practices for soil health and to significantly increase investments in soil health, by a margin of 5-10 fold above current financing commitments.

Top-soil is being lost at a rate of around 75 billion tons annually, soil carbon stocks are depleted by around 40%-60%, resulting in USD $400 billion in lost agriculture production.
How will CA4SH operate?

The coalition will advocate for multi-stakeholder partners to facilitate the adoption and scaling of a global mechanism and processes to guide and catalyze public and market-based private sector investments in soil health, with outcomes for economic returns and growth, productivity and rural livelihoods, and climate and nature. In addition the CA4SH will align and leverage off the work of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Coalition members

- Members: States
- Private sector
- Research
- Civil society
- Farmers organizations
- Multilateral organizations and Foundations
- NGOs

Linking and leveraging off existing initiatives

- Formation of the Global Soil Hub Working Group Established
- IUCN Congress WBCSD session
- Embrace the Earth Event FMO & WBCSD hosted
- COP26 Events (n=4)
- Full Partner Workshop
- UNEA Declaration
- UNCCD COP15
- Stockholm +50
- Embrace the Earth Event FMO & WBCSD hosted
- Several OpEds
- UNFSS Summit
- Updated Webpage
- GFFA
- UNCBD
- WEF
- UNFCCC
CA4SH will be operationalized through regional hubs to support the specific needs and priorities of stakeholders in different geographies.

Core Pillars

1. Accessible and inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships that empower smallholder farmers.
2. Transparent and accountable business solutions and public and private sector investments that promote equity.
3. Evidence-based policy as an enabler for all, at all scales.
4. Capacity building for on-ground implementation and monitoring.
5. Implementation of robust soil health monitoring frameworks to track interventions over time.

Please Join Us!
CA4SH is open is all interested stakeholders who are committed to restoring soil health. To contribute to the CA4SH please get in touch with the focal points below.

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Further resources

Blog – The U.N. Food Systems Summit is laying the groundwork for change – from the soil up
Blog – How can soil save us all
Blog - Coalitions in the context of the Food Systems Summit
Video on the coalition
Video on the importance of healthy soils for functioning ecosystems