



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Sowing the Seeds for Sustainable Growth in Haiti



USDA's NRCS

Seedbed preparation to accommodate flood irrigation is a common cultural practice in the Haiti Cul-de-Sac Plain. Vetiver grass is occasionally used to reduce edge of field erosion.

In the wake of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, President Obama asked U.S. Government agencies how they could help Haiti and its people recover and embark on a sustainable path into the future.

Agricultural productivity was one way, and the experts at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) knew that soil health and conservation was the first step to growing a sustainable food supply. So began the push to help Haiti's government sow the seeds of more productive and lasting soil.

To do this, NRCS and Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture developed a three-point plan for building and conserving the country's soil. The first step was to improve and enhance agriculture productivity and the management of soil and water resources; second was to identify soil types and properties; and the final step was to promote practical applications of soil information to improve land use sustainability, conservation planning, water quality, irrigation and drainage efficiency, and wind and water erosion reduction.

This soil-saving plan began in August 2013 with two NRCS trainings on soil development and management, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service's Cochran Fellowship Program under Feed the Future. Thirteen government experts and geographic information system specialists from Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture attended the trainings, which were held in Washington, D.C., and Lincoln, Nebraska. Participants learned how a soil survey system functions and build agricultural productivity.

A year later, through a United States Agency for International Development project under Feed the Future, the U.S.-Haiti conservation team completed a soil survey of about 7,500 acres, a task that included labeling, packing and sending soil samples to the United States to be characterized. Soil subsamples were left in Haiti for distribution to the National Public Works Laboratory, the Bas-Boën Laboratory, and the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine Soil Laboratory.

The work on this soil survey was no simple task, as Haiti's surveying system was outdated. U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation experts helped Haitian database managers develop a Haiti Soil Survey via an online, real time database, making some of the new system's tools accessible from smart phones.

Jacques Thomas, Haiti's Minister of Agriculture at the time, underscored the value of this soil conservation effort, noting its two major impacts: "First, [this project] allowed the Ministry of Agriculture to make available to the Departmental Directors an unprecedented planning tool. Second, the project opened up a discussion on policies for providing incentives to farmers to improve agricultural productivity and natural resources conservation. With more reliable soil data and technological packages offered, things could only be better. Moreover, this project contributed to strengthening the country's food security and possibly strengthening the resilience of agriculture in relation to climate change through a better knowledge of soils."

Natural disasters like the earthquake in Haiti highlight the need to keep skills and training up to date. NRCS has requested follow-up soil training in Haiti to be funded by the Cochran Fellowship Program and implemented in partnership with land grant universities. This next level of training would ensure participants are highly proficient in planning, managing, supporting and sustaining a viable soil survey program needed to significantly improve agricultural productivity, natural resource management, conservation planning, environmental stewardship, and land use policy. The training will also increase the human capital ready and available to respond to disasters that threaten future generations.