

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 27 January 2011

Take a closer look at soil health

Helping farmers to improve their soil health and land management practices is the focus of a regional forum planned for the Albany Entertainment Centre on Thursday March 3.

Hosted by the Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee with support from South Coast NRM and the Department of Agriculture and Food WA, the Soil Matters forum will examine the three main components of soil health- physical, chemical, and the biological 'living' aspect of the soil.

The forum will provide practical information for land managers that will help them address and improve soil health, farming systems and land management practices in the lower Great Southern. Guest speakers will aim to address gaps in knowledge and improve understanding of soil health issues and their management.

Speakers include;

Dr Margaret Roper- Soil Microbiologist, CSIRO: Dr Roper's previous research includes work on nitrogen fixation by free-living bacteria in agricultural soils; the impact of agricultural practices on microbial function in soils; research into a microbial solution to water repellent soils; the impact of tillage practices on soil microbiology; and the role of endophytic bacteria in increasing crop production, soil carbon, and plant pathology.

Chris Gazey- Senior Research Officer, DAFWA: Mr Gazey has been conducting field based research into managing acidic soils of the WA wheatbelt for the past 16 years. He will present an overview of the causes and implications of soil acidity and the management practices to treat agricultural soils with low pH. Farmers will be shown how to determine if they have low soil pH especially in the subsurface below 10 cm, and how they can apply cost effective treatments.

Paul Storer- Senior Soil Microbiologist, Western Mineral Fertilisers: Mr Storer will demonstrate the growth of Mychorriza and discuss the Mycorrhizal function and nutrient use efficiency (NUE).

Other speakers include Ross Brennan, DAFWA Albany, who will discuss the essential micro nutrients of soils; Mike Bolland from Vasse presenting on lime and fertilizer phosphorus, potassium and sulphur requirements of high rainfall pastures; and local farmers John Howard (Mt Barker) and Ian Walsh (Cranbrook).

Mr Howard started holistic farming in 2002 and will be sharing practical experiences of managing a farm holistically, the effects on the soil, the livestock and why he changed his attitude.

Mr Walsh will discuss how matching land use and land capabilities can make farming more profitable.

A panel "Q&A" session will be held following the presentations to allow for further discussion of topics.

Registrations for Soil Matters start at 8.30am with presentations concluding at 3.30pm.

Early bird registrations cost \$75 before February 27, and \$100 after this date and on the door. Student concessions are available at \$25. Registration fee includes morning and afternoon tea, and lunch.

For more information or to register contact Lynn Heppell on (08) 9851 2697, 0428 531 015 or lynn.heppell@agric.wa.gov.au

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