



**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations**

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**9<sup>th</sup> World Soil Day: Soils, where food begins” opening speech for  
Podilsky State University, Ukraine.**

**Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we celebrate the 9th United Nations World Soil Day under the theme “Soils, where food begins”.

This celebration aims to raise awareness of the importance of healthy soils, but also to engage citizens around the world to stand up for soils.

This World Soil Day is very special given the current food and fertilizers crisis is jeopardizing due to the challenges of post COVID-19 recovery, ongoing conflicts and the ever-increasing evidence of the impact of climate change. Healthy and fertile soils could become our silent ally to address this crisis.

Soils are paramount in our daily lives, providing key ecosystem services that are often forgotten and taken for granted: we depend on them for the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Soils are the foundation of agriculture. They contribute to water purification and support groundwater quality by acting as a filter, buffering and immobilizing contaminants in the soil.

While food security is a global goal that requires consideration of multiple factors, the soil fertility status is the fundamental building block on which all agricultural production systems are built.

Reduced availability and soaring fertilizer prices constitute an important component of the food security situation that we are all experiencing nowadays.

A lack of basic nutrients, including macro and micronutrients, lead to the underdevelopment of plants and reduced crop yields and nutritional value. The chronic lack of micronutrients - derived from nutrient-deficient soils and crops - causes hidden hunger that already affects over **2 billion people worldwide**.

A key challenge in achieving balanced soil fertility is to find a sustainable role for fertilizers in plant production. The overuse and misuse of fertilizers lead to harmful nutrient surpluses in agricultural fields and cause a number of environmental problems including deterioration of water quality and eutrophication of aquatic ecosystems, exacerbation of climate change due to increased release of greenhouse gases, soil pollution and crop failure. In other parts of the world, undersupply of nutrients causes plants to mine existing nutrients, leading to lower yields and micronutrient deficiencies in crops.

As you can see, soils are in danger, mostly because of human activities. **One third of global soils are already degraded** and the trend is rising because of **ten threats**: soil erosion by wind, water and tillage, loss of soil organic carbon, nutrient mismanagement, salinization and sodification, soil pollution, compaction, acidification, loss of soil biodiversity, soil sealing and waterlogging.

Investing in healthy soils brings many benefits. It will increase productivity, healthier food production, water storage and biodiversity conservation, making agrifood systems more sustainable and resilient. It is an everyday job to raise the voice of soils, our silent ally. And we are optimistic as there are now many global, regional and national initiatives taking place to safeguard this important resource and, ideally, enhance soil health.

FAO has been taking the lead on the promotion of sustainable soil management through its Global Soil Partnership. Established in 2012 and already celebrated by many people around the world, the Global Soil Partnership helps to raise awareness of the importance of healthy soils and the need to protect them. Members and multiple stakeholders work together as a coalition of the willing for soils. Actions vary from capacity development, generating soil information, developing activities on the ground and raising awareness.

FAO is determined to catalyse this momentum and ensure that implementation of sustainable management of soils grows through time. It is time to scale up sustainable practices and increase investments in sustainable soil management.

After all, soils are inherent to our origin and as such, healthy soils should constitute the legacy of our future.

Thank you to all of you for being here today and I wish you a Happy World Soil Day!

Thank you