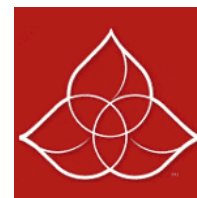


# Comprehensive Assessment of Soil Health

From the Cornell Soil Health Laboratory, Department of Soil and Crop Sciences, School of Integrative Plant Science, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. <http://soilhealth.cals.cornell.edu>



Grower:  
Terry Ettinger  
1 Forest Drive  
Illick 529  
Syracuse, NY 13210  
tlettinger@esf.edu

Sample ID: RR596  
Field ID: Vegetable Garden  
Date Sampled: 10/06/2017  
Given Soil Type: Wassaic Silt Loam  
Crops Grown: MIX/MIX/MIX  
Tillage: 7-9 inches  
Coordinates: Latitude: 42.990000000000  
Longitude: -76.130000000000

Measured Soil Textural Class: **sandy loam**

Sand: **52%** - Silt: **35%** - Clay: **11%**

Group	Indicator	Value	Rating	Constraints
physical	Available Water Capacity	0.18	76	
physical	Surface Hardness			Not rated: No Field Penetrometer Readings Submitted
physical	Subsurface Hardness			Not rated: No Field Penetrometer Readings Submitted
physical	Aggregate Stability	57.8	78	
biological	Organic Matter	5.0	99	
biological	ACE Soil Protein Index	15.6	99	
biological	Soil Respiration	1.0	90	
biological	Active Carbon	916	99	
chemical	Soil pH	7.4	96	
chemical	Extractable Phosphorus	61.4	7	High Phosphorus, Environmental Impact Risk
chemical	Extractable Potassium	190.3	100	
chemical	Minor Elements Mg: 244.9 / Fe: 4.6 / Mn: 19.8 / Zn: 2.7		100	

Overall Quality Score: **84** / Optimal

## Measured Soil Health Indicators

The Cornell Soil Health Test measures several indicators of soil physical, biological and chemical health. These are listed on the left side of the report summary, on the first page. The "value" column shows each result as a value, measured in the laboratory or in the field, in units of measure as described in the indicator summaries below. The "rating" column interprets that measured value on a scale of 0 to 100, where higher scores are better. Ratings in red are particularly important to take note of, but any in yellow, particularly those that are close to a rating of 30 are also important in addressing soil health problems.

- **A rating below 20 indicates a *Constraint* and is color-coded red.** This indicates a problem that is likely limiting yields, crop quality, and long-term sustainability of the agroecosystem. In several cases this indicates risks of environmental loss as well. The "constraint" column provides a short list of soil processes that are not functioning optimally when an indicator rating is red. It is particularly important to take advantage of any opportunities to improve management that will address these constraints.
- **A rating between 20 and 40 indicates *Low-level functioning* and is color-coded orange.** This indicates that a soil process is functioning somewhat poorly and addressing this should be considered in the field management plan. The Management Suggestions Table at the end of the Soil Health Assessment Report provides linkages to field management practices that are useful in addressing each soil indicator process.
- **A rating between 40 and 60 indicates *Suboptimal functioning* and is color-coded yellow.** This indicates that soil health could be better, and yield and sustainability could decrease over time if this is not addressed. This is especially so if the condition is being caused, or not being alleviated, by current management. Pay attention particularly to those indicators rated in yellow and close to 40.
- **A rating between 60 and 80 indicates *Excellent functioning* and is color-coded light green.** This indicates that this soil process is functioning at a non-limiting level. Field soil management approaches should be maintained at the current intensity or improved.
- **A rating of 80 or greater indicates *Optimal or near-optimal functioning* and is color-coded dark green.** Past management has been effective at maintaining soil health. It can be useful to note which particular aspects of management have likely maintained soil health, so that such management can be continued. Note that soil health is often high, when first converting from a permanent sod or forest. In these situations, intensive management quickly damages soil health when it includes intensive tillage, low organic matter inputs, bare soils for significant parts of the year, or excessive traffic, especially during wet times.
- **The Overall Quality Score** at the bottom of the report is an average of all ratings, and provides an indication of the soil's overall health status. However, the important part is to know which particular soil processes are constrained or suboptimal so that these issues can be addressed through appropriate management. Therefore the ratings for each indicator are more important information.

**The Indicators** measured in the Cornell Soil Health Assessment are important soil properties and characteristics in themselves, but also are representative of key soil processes, necessary for the proper functioning of the soil. The following is a summary of the indicators measured, what each of these indicates about your soil's health status, and what may influence the relevant properties and processes described.

**A Management Suggestions Table** follows, at the end of the report, with short and long term

suggestions for addressing constraints or maintaining a well-functioning system. This table will indicate constraints identified in this assessment for your soil sample by the same yellow and red color coding described above. Please also find further useful information by following the links to relevant publications and web resources that follow this section.

**Texture** is an inherent property of soil, meaning that it is rarely changed by management. It is thus not a soil health indicator per se, but is helpful both in interpreting the measured values of indicators (see the Cornell Soil Health Assessment Training Manual), and for deciding on appropriate management strategies that will work for that soil.

**Your soil's measured textural class and composition: sandy loam**

**Sand: 52% Silt: 35% Clay: 11%**

**Available Water Capacity** is a measure of the porosity of the soil, within a pore size range important for water retention. Measured by the amount of water held by the soil sample between field capacity and wilting point by applying different levels of air pressure, the value is presented in grams of water per gram of soil. This value is scored against an observed distribution in regional soils with similar texture. A physical soil characteristic, AWC is an indicator of the amount of plant-available water the soil can store, and therefore how crops will fare in droughty conditions. Soils with lower storage capacity will cause greater risk of drought stress. AWC is generally lower when total organic matter and/or aggregation is low. It can be improved by reducing tillage, long-term cover cropping, and adding large amounts of well-decomposed organic matter such as compost. Coarse textured (sandy) soils inherently store less water than finer textured soils, so that managing for relatively high water storage capacity is particularly important in coarse textured soils. While the textural effect cannot be influenced by management, management decisions can be in part based on an understanding of inherent soil characteristics.

**Your measured Available Water Capacity value is 0.18 g/g**, corresponding with a score of **76**. This score is in the **Excellent** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that this soil process is enhancing overall soil resilience. Soil management should aim at maintaining this functionality while addressing any other measured soil constraints as identified in the Soil Health Assessment Report.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Aggregate Stability** is a measure of how well soil aggregates or crumbs hold together under rainfall or other rapid wetting stresses. Measured by the fraction of dried aggregates that disintegrate under a controlled, simulated rainfall event similar in energy delivery to a hard spring rain, the value is presented as a percent, and scored against a distribution observed in regional soils with similar textural characteristics. A physical characteristic of soil, Aggregate Stability is a good indicator of soil biological and physical health. Good aggregate stability helps prevent crusting, runoff, and erosion, and facilitates aeration, infiltration, and water storage, along with improving seed germination and root and microbial health. Aggregate stability is influenced by microbial activity, as aggregates are largely held together by microbial colonies and exudates, and is impacted by management practices, particularly tillage, cover cropping, and fresh organic matter additions.

**Your measured Aggregate Stability value is 57.8 %**, corresponding with a score of **78**. This score is in the **Excellent** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that this soil process is enhancing overall soil resilience. Soil management should aim at maintaining this functionality while addressing any**

**other measured soil constraints as identified in the Soil Health Assessment Report.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Organic Matter (OM)** is a measure of the carbonaceous material in the soil that is biomass or biomass-derived. Measured by the mass lost on combustion of oven-dried soil, the value is presented as a percent of the total soil mass. This is scored against an observed distribution of OM in regional soils with similar texture. A soil characteristic that measures a physical substance of biological origin, OM is a key or central indicator of the physical, biological, and chemical health of the soil. OM content is an important influence on soil aggregate stabilization, water retention, nutrient cycling, and ion exchange capacity. OM acts as a long-term slow-release pool for nutrients. Soils with low organic matter tend to require higher inputs, and be less resilient to drought and extreme rainfall. OM is directly derived from biomass of microbial communities in the soil (bacterial, fungal, and protozoan), as well as from plant roots and detritus, and biomass-containing amendments like manure, green manures, mulches, composts, and crop residues. The retention and accumulation of OM is influenced by management practices such as tillage and cover cropping, as well as by microbial community growth. Intensive tillage and lack of organic matter additions from various sources (amendments, residues, active crop or cover crop growth) will decrease organic matter content and overall soil health with time.

**Your measured Organic Matter value is 5.0 %**, corresponding with a score of **99**. This score is in the **Optimal** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Soil Proteins** are the fraction of the soil organic matter that are present as proteins or protein-like substances. This represents the large pool of organically bound N in the SOM, which microbial activity can mineralize, and make available for plant uptake. Measured by extraction with a citrate buffer under high temperature and pressure (hence Autoclave Citrate Extractable, or ACE proteins), the value given is expressed in mg extracted per gram of soil. As the method used extracts only a readily extractable fraction of the total amount of soil proteins in the SOM, we present this value as an index rather than as an absolute quantity. A measure of a physical substance, protein content is an indicator of the biological and chemical health of the soil, and is very well associated with overall soil health status. Protein content, as organically bound N, influences the ability of the soil to make N available by mineralization, and has been associated with soil aggregation and water movement. Protein content can be influenced by biomass additions, the presence of roots and soil microbes, and tends to decrease with increasing soil disturbance such as tillage.

**Your measured ACE Soil Protein Index value is 15.6**, corresponding with a score of **99**. This score is in the **Optimal** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Soil Respiration** is a measure of the metabolic activity of the soil microbial community. Measured by capturing and quantifying carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) produced by this activity, the value is expressed as total CO<sub>2</sub> released (in mg) per gram of soil over a 4 day incubation period. Respiration is scored against an observed distribution in regional soils, taking texture into account. A direct biological activity measurement, respiration is an indicator of the biological status of the soil community, integrating abundance and activity of microbial life. Soil biological activity

accomplishes numerous important functions, such as cycling of nutrients into and out of soil OM pools, transformations of N between its several forms, and decomposition of incorporated residues. Soil biological activity influences key physical characteristics like OM accumulation, and aggregate formation and stabilization. Microbial activity is influenced by management practices such as tillage, cover cropping, manure or green manure incorporation, and biocide (pesticide, fungicide, herbicide) use.

**Your measured Soil Respiration value is 1.0 mg**, corresponding with a score of **90**. This score is in the **Optimal** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Active Carbon** is a measure of the small portion of the organic matter that can serve as an easily available food source for soil microbes, thus helping maintain a healthy soil food web. Measured by potassium permanganate oxidation, the value is presented in parts per million (ppm), and scored against an observed distribution in regional soils with similar texture. While a measure of a class of physical substances, active carbon is a good leading indicator of biological soil health and tends to respond to changes in management earlier than total organic matter content, because when a large population of soil microbes is fed plentifully with enough organic matter over an extended period of time, well-decomposed organic matter builds up. A healthy and diverse microbial community is essential to maintain disease resistance, nutrient cycling, aggregation, and many other important functions. Intensive tillage and lack of organic matter additions from various sources (amendments, residues, active crop or cover crop growth) will decrease active carbon, and thus will over the longer term decrease total organic matter.

**Your measured Active Carbon value is 916 ppm**, corresponding with a score of **99**. This score is in the **Optimal** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Soil pH** is a measure of how acidic the soil is, which controls how available nutrients are to crops. A physico-chemical characteristic of soils, pH is an indicator of the chemical or nutrient status of the soil. Measured with an electrode in a 1:1 soil:water suspension, the value is presented in standard pH units, and scored using an optimality curve. Optimum pH is around 6.2-6.8 for most crops (exceptions include potatoes and blueberries, which grow best in more acidic soil – this is not accounted for in the report interpretation). If pH is too high, nutrients such as phosphorus, iron, manganese, copper and boron become unavailable to the crop. If pH is too low, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and molybdenum become unavailable. Lack of nutrient availability will limit crop yields and quality. Aluminum toxicity can also be a concern in low pH soils, which can severely decrease root growth and yield, and in some cases lead to accumulation of aluminum and other metals in crop tissue. In general, as soil OM increases, crops can tolerate lower soil pH. Soil pH also influences the ability of certain pathogens to thrive, and of beneficial organisms to effectively colonize roots. Raising the pH through lime or wood ash applications, and organic matter additions, will help immobilize aluminum and heavy metals, and maintain proper nutrient availability.

**Your measured Soil pH value is 7.4**, corresponding with a score of **96**. This score is in the **Optimal** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that**

**management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Extractable Phosphorus** is a measure of phosphorus (P) availability to a crop. Measured on a modified Morgan's extractant, using a rapid-flow analyzer, the value is presented in parts per million (ppm), and scored against an optimality curve for sufficiency or excess. P is an essential plant macronutrient, and its availability varies with soil pH and mineral composition. Low P values indicate poor P availability to plants, and excessively high P values indicates a risk of adverse environmental impact through runoff and contamination of surface waters. Most soils in the Northeast store unavailable P from the soil's mineral make up or from previously applied fertilizer or manure. This becomes more available to plants as soils warm up. Therefore, incorporating or banding 10-25 lbs/acre of soluble 'starter' P fertilizer at planting can be useful even when soil levels are optimum. Some cover crops, such as buckwheat, are good at mining otherwise unavailable P so that it becomes more available to the following crop. When plants associate with mycorrhizal fungi, these can also help make P (and other nutrients and water) more available to the crop. P is an environmental contaminant and runoff of P into fresh surface water will cause damage through eutrophication, so over-application is strongly discouraged, especially close to surface water, on slopes, and on large scales.

**Your measured Extractable Phosphorus value is 61.4 ppm**, corresponding with a score of **7**. This score is in the **Very Low (constraining)** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **Extractable Phosphorus level should be given a high priority in management decisions based on this assessment, as it is likely to be an important constraint to proper soil functioning and sustainability of management at this time.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Extractable Potassium** is a measure of potassium (K) availability to the crop. Measured on a modified Morgan's extract using an ICP Spectrometer, the value is presented in parts per million (ppm), and scored against an optimality curve for sufficiency. K is an indicator of soil nutrient status, as it is an essential plant macronutrient. Plants with higher potassium tend to be more tolerant of frost and cold. Thus good potassium levels may help with season extension. While soil pH only marginally affects K availability, K is easily leached from sandy soils and is only weakly held by increased organic matter, so that applications of the amount removed by the specific crop being grown are generally necessary in such soils.

**Your measured Extractable Potassium value is 190.3 ppm**, corresponding with a score of **100**. This score is in the **Optimal** range, relative to regional soils with similar texture. **This suggests that management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Minor Elements**, also called secondary (calcium, magnesium and sulfur) and micro (iron, manganese, zinc, copper, boron, molybdenum, etc.) nutrients are essential plant nutrients taken up by plants in smaller quantities than the macro nutrients N, P and K. If any minor elements are deficient, this will decrease yield and crop quality, but toxicities can also occur when concentrations are too high. This assessment's minor elements rating indicates whether four measured micronutrients (magnesium, iron, manganese, and zinc) are deficient or excessive. Micronutrient availability is strongly influenced by pH and organic matter. Low pH increases the

availability of most micronutrients, whereas high pH increases the availability of molybdenum, magnesium and calcium. High OM and microbial activity tend to increase micronutrient availability. Note that this test does not measure all important micronutrients. Consider submitting a sample for a complete micronutrient analysis to find out the levels of the other micronutrients.

**Your measured Minor Elements Rating is 100.** This score is in the **Optimal** range. Magnesium (244.9 ppm) is sufficient, Iron (4.6 ppm) is sufficient, Manganese (19.8 ppm) is sufficient, Zinc (2.7 ppm) is sufficient. **This suggests that management practices should be geared toward maintaining this condition, as it currently indicates ideal soil functioning.** Please refer to the management suggestions table at the end of this document.

**Overall Quality Score:** an overall quality score is computed from the individual indicator scores. This score is further rated as follows: less than 20% is regarded as very low, 20-40% is low, 40-60% is medium, 60-80% is excellent, and greater than 80% is optimal. The highest possible quality score is 100 and the least score is 0, thus it is a relative overall soil health status indicator. However, of greater importance than a single overall metric is identification of constrained or suboptimally functioning soil processes, so that these issues can be addressed through appropriate management. The overall soil quality score should be taken as a general summary rather than the main focus.

**Your Overall Quality Score is 84,** which is in the **Optimal** range.

## Management Suggestions for Physical and Biological Constraints

<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Short Term Management Suggestions</b>	<b>Long Term Management Suggestions</b>
Available Water Capacity Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add stable organic materials, mulch</li> <li>• Add compost or biochar</li> <li>• Incorporate high biomass cover crop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce tillage</li> <li>• Rotate with sod crops</li> <li>• Incorporate high biomass cover crop</li> </ul>
Aggregate Stability Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate fresh organic materials</li> <li>• Use shallow-rooted cover/rotation crops</li> <li>• Add manure, green manure, mulch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce tillage</li> <li>• Use a surface mulch</li> <li>• Rotate with sod crops and mycorrhizal hosts</li> </ul>
Organic Matter Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add stable organic materials, mulch</li> <li>• Add compost and biochar</li> <li>• Incorporate high biomass cover crop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce tillage/mechanical cultivation</li> <li>• Rotate with sod crop</li> <li>• Incorporate high biomass cover crop</li> </ul>
ACE Soil Protein Index Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add N-rich organic matter (low C:N source like manure, high N well-finished compost)</li> <li>• Incorporate young, green, cover crop biomass</li> <li>• Plant legumes and grass-legume mixtures</li> <li>• Inoculate legume seed with Rhizobia &amp; check for nodulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce tillage</li> <li>• Rotate with forage legume sod crop</li> <li>• Cover crop and add fresh manure</li> <li>• Keep pH at 6.2-6.5 (helps N fixation)</li> <li>• Monitor C:N ratio of inputs</li> </ul>
Soil Respiration Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain plant cover throughout season</li> <li>• Add fresh organic materials</li> <li>• Add manure, green manure</li> <li>• Consider reducing biocide usage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce tillage/mechanical cultivation</li> <li>• Increase rotational diversity</li> <li>• Maintain plant cover throughout season</li> <li>• Cover crop with symbiotic host plants</li> </ul>
Active Carbon Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add fresh organic materials</li> <li>• Use shallow-rooted cover/rotation crops</li> <li>• Add manure, green manure, mulch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce tillage/mechanical cultivation</li> <li>• Rotate with sod crop</li> <li>• Cover crop whenever possible</li> </ul>

## Management Suggestions for Chemical Constraints

Constraint	Short Term Management Suggestions	Long Term Management Suggestions
Soil pH Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add lime or wood ash per soil test recommendations</li> <li>• Add calcium sulfate (gypsum) in addition to lime if aluminum is high</li> <li>• Use less ammonium or urea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test soil annually &amp; add "maintenance" lime per soil test recommendations to keep pH in range</li> <li>• Raise organic matter to improve buffering capacity</li> </ul>
Soil pH High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop adding lime or wood ash</li> <li>• Add elemental sulfur per soil test recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test soil annually</li> <li>• Use higher % ammonium or urea</li> </ul>
Extractable Phosphorus Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add P amendments per soil test recommendations</li> <li>• Use cover crops to recycle fixed P</li> <li>• Adjust pH to 6.2-6.5 to free up fixed P</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote mycorrhizal populations</li> <li>• Maintain a pH of 6.2-6.5</li> <li>• Use cover crops to recycle fixed P</li> </ul>
<b>Extractable Phosphorus High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop adding manure and compost</li> <li>• Choose low or no-P fertilizer blend</li> <li>• Apply only 20 lbs/ac starter P if needed</li> <li>• Apply P at or below crop removal rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use cover crops that accumulate P and export to low P fields or offsite</li> <li>• Consider low P rations for livestock</li> <li>• Consider phytase for non-ruminants</li> </ul>
Extractable Potassium Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add wood ash, fertilizer, manure, or compost per soil test recommendations</li> <li>• Use cover crops to recycle K</li> <li>• Choose a high K fertilizer blend</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use cover crops to recycle K</li> <li>• Add "maintenance" K per soil recommendations each year to keep K consistently available</li> </ul>
Minor Elements Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add chelated micros per soil test recommendations</li> <li>• Use cover crops to recycle micronutrients</li> <li>• Do not exceed pH 6.5 for most crops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote mycorrhizal populations</li> <li>• Improve organic matter</li> <li>• Decrease soil P (binds micros)</li> </ul>
Minor Elements High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise pH to 6.2-6.5 (for all high micros except Molybdenum)</li> <li>• Do not use fertilizers with micronutrients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a pH of 6.2-6.5</li> <li>• Monitor irrigation/improve drainage</li> <li>• Improve soil calcium levels</li> </ul>

School of Integrative Plant Science, Soil and Crop Sciences Section, G01 Bradfield Hall, 306 Tower Road, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, email: [soilhealth@cornell.edu](mailto:soilhealth@cornell.edu)

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University

Developed in partnership with [Cornell Soil Health](#), [Farmier](#), and [GreenStart](#). Hosted by [Farmier](#)