

# EXPANDING STATE HEALTHY SOILS PRACTICES

A Five-Year Impact Report on the  
National Healthy Soils Policy Network



**CalCAN**  
CALIFORNIA CLIMATE &  
AGRICULTURE NETWORK

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# EXPANDING STATE HEALTHY SOILS PRACTICES

## A Five-Year Impact Report on the National Healthy Soils Policy Network

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The full report is available on the National Healthy Soils Policy Network  
website: [www.soilpolicynetwork.org/5year](http://www.soilpolicynetwork.org/5year)



The California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN) is a statewide coalition that advances state and federal policy to realize the powerful climate solutions offered by sustainable and organic agriculture.

The National Healthy Soils Policy Network (National Network) is a project of CalCAN, launched in 2018 to share the lessons learned in California and support farmer-focused organizations across the country to win state policies that scale up the use of healthy soils and climate-resilient practices on farms and ranches.

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# Acknowledgments

The National Healthy Soils Policy Network’s achievements are a testament to the collaboration and commitment of our members, active across 26 states and supported by an extensive network of advocacy organizations at local, regional, and national levels. This report celebrates our collective progress in the healthy soils movement.



We are also grateful for the generous support of the following funders who have directed their grants to support the National Network: Ceres Trust, NoRegrets Initiative, Patagonia, Panta Rhea Foundation, Tortuga Foundation.

The information provided and the positions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of CalCAN, and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Network members.



# Summary

The National Healthy Soils Policy Network (National Network) is a farmer-forward community of practice that supports sustainable agriculture and family farm organizations across the country to win state policies that scale up the use of healthy soils and climate-resilient practices on farms and ranches. Starting in 2018 with 14 farmer-serving member organizations representing 13 states, the National Network has grown to include 28 member organizations, expanding our collective reach across more than half the country.

The California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN) supports the National Network with fundraising, staffing with a coordinator and regional hub director, and strategic leadership. This Five-Year Impact Report was drafted to provide a review of the progress made since the launch of the National Network, as well as fodder and focus for future development.

Regular and well-attended monthly meetings provide consistent opportunities for members to learn, share inspiration and ideas, workshop their campaigns and co-create a community of practice. The National Network has convened nearly **60 virtual gatherings and trainings and 2 in-person convenings** and maintains a Resource Library of video recordings of workshops, training materials, research articles, and model legislation.

The National Network provides mini-grant funding to members to support farmer and rancher education and leadership development on healthy soils policy. After five annual cycles of mini-grants, the National Network has distributed **77 awards to 27 unique organizations**, with an **average award amount of \$5,265, totaling \$405,434**.

Since the formation of the National Network in 2018, our members have played active roles in the introduction of 62 pieces of healthy soils legislation, the **successful passage of 31 bills and the creation of 7 state healthy soils programs**. Outside of California, they have secured at least **\$48 million in state budget appropriations** for healthy soils incentives and programs.

**31**

**Bills Successfully Passed**

**7**

**State Healthy Soils Programs Created**

**\$48M**

**In State Budget Appropriations**

**\$405,434**

**Total Award Amount**

**77**

**Total Awards**

**\$5,265**

**Average Award Amount**

**60**

**Virtual Gatherings and Trainings**

**2**

**In-person Convenings**



# Introduction



Representatives of member organizations gather for our second in-person meeting held in Davis, CA, November 2022

The National Healthy Soils Policy Network (“the National Network”) is a farmer-forward community of practice that supports sustainable agriculture and family farm organizations across the country to achieve state policy goals which scale up the use of healthy soils and climate-resilient practices on farms and ranches.

Our 28 member organizations from across the country across the country are nonprofit organizations or coalitions which share a mission to serve and support sustainable, organic, beginning, minority, and/or family farmers with education, training, organizing, and/or policy advocacy. Our members work in their states to advance farmer-informed policies that support farmers and ranchers in using practices that improve soil health and have other climate and environmental health benefits.

“The network has been an incredible space to collaborate with and learn from soil health programs in other states. The mini-grant provided by the Network was instrumental in engaging producers in a soil health policy in Colorado.

– Erin Foster West,  
National Young Farmers  
Coalition



The National Healthy Soils Policy Network employs four intersecting sets of strategies to support member organizations in advancing state-level healthy soils practices:

## Policy Incubation



We share examples and approaches to using public policy and public funding that scale up the use of healthy soil practices and contribute to more resilient, healthy and just farming systems.

We developed a clearinghouse of policy templates, including bills which have been drafted, introduced and passed in member states across the country, providing sample language to help jumpstart the drafting process for new policy vehicles. We also monitor and collaborate on federal policy opportunities to advocate for state-level soil health funding.

## Learning Laboratory



We share campaign strategies, stories, messaging and educational materials.

Members regularly provide group consultations for each other at our monthly meetings, workshopping campaign plans and forming peer-coaching relationships. Members often cite the value of being able to collaborate with and learn from other organizations that are working on healthy soils policy, learning from each other's successes as well as mistakes. Skill-building training sessions are a regular part of our monthly meetings. Members and guest speakers bring content expertise and special training to our members.

## Community Building



The National Network provides a space for organizational representatives to connect with each other and build relationships which not only facilitate information sharing and collaboration, but also provide the kind of mutual support and encouragement which comes with community.

Our members often mention the value of the support and inspiration that they receive from other members. This can be helpful for organizers who are facing challenges, have limited capacity or otherwise feeling discouraged or isolated. We help members and the producers they represent see that they are a part of a broader movement, and that they can make positive change on issues as daunting as the climate crisis.

## Shifting the Conversation



We lift up farmer voices across the country to create a new narrative about the constructive role agriculture can play in addressing the climate crisis.

Our mini-grants program enables organizers to engage farmers and ranchers in soil health education and advocacy, serving as aggregators of farmer voices and shifting the conversation. We have done some collective thinking about narrative development, messaging and framing. Working across rural and urban communities, we identify the shared values that build collective power.



# National Network Equity Statement

CalCAN and the National Network strive for an equitable distribution of agriculture conservation resources. Soil health and other conservation programs should be designed and implemented to improve access and impact for historically underserved farmers and ranchers. Specifically, this includes small and medium-scale farmers, people with low-income/low wealth, people of color, and women.

White farmers currently own 98% of the private farmland in the U.S., controlling the land use decisions and farming practices used on almost 900 billion acres. Many are unfamiliar with the history of agriculture in the United States that brought this inequity about, including the nation's legacy of enslavement, land theft and the exploitation of immigrant labor. The institutional structures in place continue to confer benefit to those who hold land and wealth. Furthermore, the historic and present-day experience and knowledge of indigenous and agrarian cultures around the world have been undervalued or ignored, or in some cases appropriated without attribution.

Present-day white agricultural landowners—and the organizations that serve and support them—have a critical role to play in bringing about a more equitable food and farming system. Together, we can build power to address the climate crisis, create thriving rural communities, improve environmental stewardship and improve human health, particularly for people of color who are disproportionately impacted by climate change and agricultural pollution.

Toward this end, we are committed to:

- Partnering with all farmers and ranchers, including farmers and ranchers of color, to identify solutions to both inequity and the climate crisis
- Challenge policies that perpetuate systems of oppression and inequities in agricultural conservation
- Advance policies and technical assistance resources that prioritize small and medium-scale and systematically disenfranchised farmers who are most vulnerable to climate impacts and may lack the resources to transition to more resilient practices.
- Create an open and transparent process for continual feedback and improvement in our work.
- Ensure that historically underserved producers have a voice in resource allocation decisions because those most directly and disproportionately impacted by structural barriers are often the best suited to propose solutions that will work.
- To attribute and acknowledge whenever possible the importance of indigenous knowledge in providing the foundation for present-day approaches to climate-resilient agriculture.
- Continually question assumptions about what is possible, necessary and who should participate.

*We do this work humbly and with gratitude for those who came before us and continue to provide examples and teachings of Traditional Ecological Knowledge that are more pertinent now than ever.*



# POLICY MOVEMENT: BUILDING ON THE MOMENTUM FROM CALIFORNIA



The National Network is a project of the California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN), a statewide coalition that advances state and federal policy to catalyze the powerful climate solutions offered by sustainable and organic agriculture.

The impetus for starting the National Network in 2018 arose from CalCAN's experience influencing the launch and implementation of California's suite of climate and agriculture policies and programs which are the first in the nation and can serve as models for other states and federally. CalCAN supports the National Network with fundraising, staffing with a coordinator and regional hub director, strategic leadership, and through collaboration with the Steering Committee to guide the National Network's direction and priorities.

The primary focus for the National Network is on supporting farmer-led, farmer-forward healthy soils policies and programs at the state level. Many members credit the above-outlined strategies for increasing the impacts of their organizing efforts and helping advance their respective campaigns.

Since the formation of the National Network in 2018, our members have played active roles in the following state-level progress on healthy soils policy (current as of October 2023):<sup>1</sup>

**62**

**Healthy Soils-related bills introduced**

**31**

**Healthy Soils-related bills passed**

**7**

**Healthy Soils Programs created**

**\$48,270,000**

**in state budget appropriations for Healthy Soils incentives and programs**

<sup>1</sup> These data do not include the State of California, which is an outlier and would skew the total.







Farmers from across Massachusetts meet with lawmakers to explain the value of healthy soils, February 2020. Photo provided by NOFA/Mass.

### Policies the National Network members are advancing include:

- Establish and fund dedicated state healthy soils programs to provide incentives and technical assistance that help farmers and land managers scale out healthy soils practices (top priority)
- Augment existing or other proposed state programs, conservation and climate action plans to prioritize soil health practices
- Provide for crop insurance rewards, tax credits/exemptions and other cost-share incentives to subsidize cover cropping, nutrient capture projects and other healthy soils practices on farmland
- Create state Task Forces, Working Groups and Soil Health Program feasibility studies
- Improve agricultural codes and infrastructure for on-farm use of manure, compost, food residuals
- Resolutions and Declarations of “Soil Health Day/Week” to raise visibility of the issue
- Programs and policies to support managed grazing and perennial farming systems

Most recently, in 2023, our members realized the following progress on state healthy soils policy:

#### Illinois Stewardship Alliance (IL)

After three years of organizing, the Alliance won the passage of a bill to create the Illinois Healthy Soils Initiative and direct state agencies to collaborate on an accelerated soil health framework. A successful push on the FY2024 budget provided up to \$4 million for the new initiative.

#### New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group (NM)

Successfully advocated for the “Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund,” securing an initial amount of \$100 million, including approximately \$1 million per cycle for the Healthy Soils Program they established in 2019.

#### Northern Plains Resource Council (MT)

Established a state soil health week aimed at building awareness and education. Resolution passed with bipartisan support.

#### Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network (OR)

Successfully advocated for passage of a Natural Climate Solutions Bill, providing incentives and technical assistance for land managers to adopt natural climate solutions, including soil health practices.

#### Pasa Sustainable Agriculture (PA)

Leveraged an existing bill (1994 PA Sustainable Agriculture Act) to convince the PA State Conservation Commission to create a Soil Health Program. Their long-running Soil Health Benchmark study continued in 2023, working with more than 100 farmers to assess their soil health and implement improvement practices.

“The Network has been instrumental in helping us strategize our campaigns and outreach efforts for developing soil health policy in Ohio. The Network is a wonderful opportunity to work and connect in community and not in competition.

– Lauren Hirtle,  
Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association  
(OEFFA)



## Federal Policy

Starting in 2021, the National Network began directing energy to supporting our members' familiarity with federal soil health policy. While several states now have programs that can make grants to incentivize healthy soils practices, getting money to fund them is challenging. For many states, the conservation programs of the Farm Bill are the most promising source of funding for healthy soils and climate-related programs and activities. The National Network is increasingly providing strategic training and mini-grant funding to educate farmers about federal policy since the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 and the increased need for advocacy related to the 2024 Farm Bill.



A "round table" discussion of the Farm Bill at Funks Grove Heritage Fruits and Grain, 2023. Photo provided by Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

We have also hosted several training sessions on how to develop relationships with state offices of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, which administers federal funds that incentivize healthy soils practices.

Our federal activities rely heavily on the expertise and strategic direction of the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#) (NSAC) and their climate change subcommittee and Farm Bill conservation and climate issue areas. Approximately two-thirds of our members also participate in NSAC, and because of the increased funding opportunities available through USDA NRCS, we stay closely aligned with NSAC staff and strategic approaches.

“Funding through the National Network supports our ability to ensure farmers’ voices and expertise are centered in our advocacy work, and to regularly test out innovative strategies to consistently increase our impact.

– Maddie Kempner,  
NOFA-VT

## Farm Bill for Healthy Soils

We help our members leverage the regional/state networks and expertise that are developing in state healthy soils campaigns in order to influence the Farm Bill’s priorities and framing. The Farm Bill provides a number of opportunities to advance soil health and climate resilience. As a coordinated collection of grassroots organizations, we are well-positioned to elevate the voices of farmers and state-level sustainable agriculture organizations regarding how important it is to invest in healthy soils and other agriculture strategies for curbing and adapting to climate change.

To this end, we have hosted several training and strategy sessions on the Farm Bill and offered two rounds of funding in 2022 and 2023 totaling over \$120,000. These mini-grants (averaging \$6,700 each) focused on educating National Network members about the Farm Bill and the Agriculture Resilience Act (which includes state assistance for soil health programs), and sharing strategies for engaging their farmer and rancher partners in policy advocacy (*Read more about our mini-grants program later in this report.*)



## Regional Hubs: Equitable Distribution of IRA Funds

Passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022 promises a historic investment of almost \$20 billion over five years in four USDA conservation programs (CSP, EQIP, ACEP, and RCPP) and earmarks the funds for climate-smart agricultural and forestry practices. However, there exist multiple threats to the effective impact of this investment, including potential rescission of the funds and the lack of NRCS staffing needed in order to provide for equitable distribution of the funds to small, mid-sized, diversified and underserved producers.

In order to help maximize the potential positive impact of the IRA, we formed a working group in 2023 that meets regularly to share strategic approaches for IRA implementation. In October 2023, we hired a full-time Agriculture Conservation Regional Hub Director who will lead an effort in 2023-24 to build on the National Network structure and support members in these ways:



NOFA-NY board member and farmer, Wes Gillingham talking to Congressman Molinaro following a Farm bill roundtable at Stony Ridge Orchard. Photo by Katie Baidon. 2023

- **Add capacity, expertise and networking opportunities for outreach and technical assistance related to IRA funding solicitations**
- **Share strategies with members and allies to increase their effectiveness in working with NRCS to secure funding for the small and medium-sized, organic, diversified and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers they serve**
- **Coordinate advocacy to influence NRCS program operation and implementation**
- **Develop and implement a strategy to defend against attempts in Congress to appropriate IRA funding for purposes other than agricultural climate conservation**
- **Increase our capacity to advocate for improvements to conservation policy, programs and processes in order to better serve producers**

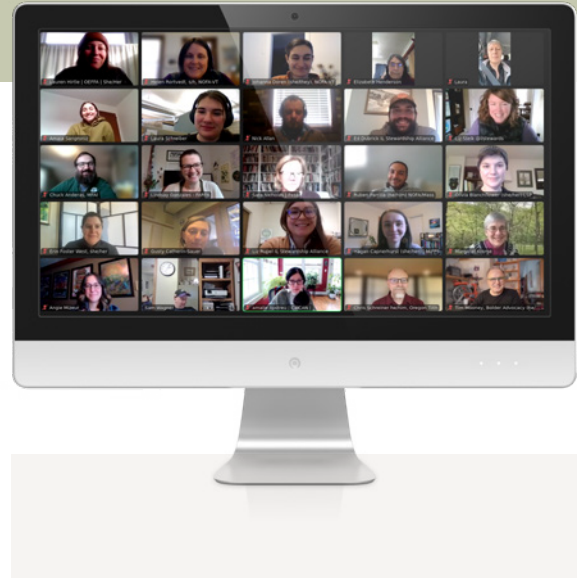
“We took full advantage of sample bill language, best practices and lessons learned from the National Network partners as we developed Oregon’s Healthy Soils Bill. The National Network was an extremely valuable resource in our policy development and campaign implementation!”

– Megan Kemple,  
Oregon Climate & Agriculture Network



# NATIONAL NETWORK MEETINGS

The regular rhythm of monthly network meetings provides a consistent opportunity for members to share inspiration, successes, challenges and solutions for their respective Healthy Soils campaigns. Members note that being more than “report-backs” or one-way briefings, the format of these virtual gatherings enables them to cultivate peer relationships and feel connected to and supported by a national community of advocates. Members are able to regularly engage in peer consulting sessions, gaining new perspectives and insights on their work through what has grown to become a community of practice.



Meetings began soon after the formation of the Network in March of 2018 and have maintained consistently high levels of participation, with roughly two-thirds of members regularly attending. With a monthly cadence since mid-2020, the Network has hosted a total of **53 virtual meetings** as of September 2023, and our video archive contains recordings of 39 meetings and trainings.

Through active and rotating facilitation, members are able to hear from a diversity of voices and experiences from within the National Network as well as from the occasional guest presenter. In addition to the regular sharing of member updates on campaign progress, challenges and successes, members have shared in-depth presentations and stories illustrating best practices and lessons learned, including deeper dives on the following topics:

**Healthy Soils Policies to Address Social & Racial Justice**

**Farmer Organizing in Red States**

**Rural Organizing & Base-Building Tactics**

**Integrating Healthy Soils Incentives Into Farmland Conservation Programs**

Guest speakers have brought content expertise and special trainings to our members, including:

**Jessica Ritter (IATP)**

Why Carbon Markets Won't Work for Agriculture

**Brian Shobe (CalCAN)**

Progress Report on California's Healthy Soils Program

**Belinda Griswold (Resource Media)**

Media Strategies for Organizing and Power Building

**Juli Obudzinski (Policy Consultant)**

The Nuts & Bolts of NRCS Cooperative Agreements

**Cathy Day (NSAC)** Farm Bill Organizing





Monthly gatherings also provide for the regular dissemination and strategic discussion of relevant federal campaigns from our members, some of whom are also a part of the Climate Change Subcommittee of NSAC.

We have also hosted two in-person gatherings. Our first gathering was held in conjunction with the NSAC annual meeting in summer 2018 to launch the National Network. The second was held in conjunction with the CalCAN summit in November 2022. These intensive gatherings allowed for significant strategic planning, training and workshopping of member campaigns. Members have highlighted the lasting value in the personal relationships which were enabled by in-person exchanges.

## MINI-GRANTS

Our Farmer Engagement mini-grants are a primary vehicle whereby the National Network supports the work of our member organizations in engaging farmers in the healthy soils movement. These general support grants provide resources for National Network members to carry out farmer and rancher education and leadership development on healthy soils policy. In this way, we are able to multiply the change-making efforts of our members and elevate farmers' voices in the process.

A simple application process, informed by the ongoing relationships we have with our members, allows us to strategically disperse funds to grassroots organizations at critical junctures in their campaigns. A steering committee (consisting of member representatives elected by the larger group) makes funding recommendations after reviewing applications and asking follow-up questions, in order to understand how proposed farmer/rancher engagement activities will benefit the broader effort to scale out healthy soils practices in a given state.



A "soil crawl" at Stone Soup Garden in Laurel, MT. Photo provided by Northern Plains Resource Council.

“These grants are essential to our ability to compensate farmers for their participation - without them, we'd be asking for them to take time away from their operations and the source of their income. This would naturally result in a less diverse group of farmers who were able to participate.

– Devora Kimelman-Block,  
Fair Farms Campaign



After five annual cycles of mini-grants, the National Network has distributed **77 awards to 27 unique organizations**, with an **average award amount of \$5,265, totaling \$405,434** (as of November 2023). This represents approximately 60% of the National Network’s budget.



Types of activities funded have included:

- Materials and trainings for producers on policy advocacy, public speaking and the power of personal narrative
- Interviews and listening sessions to better understand the needs, barriers, and aspirations of farming communities and what good healthy soils policy would look like for them
- Stipends for farmers to attend soil health conferences and public speaking opportunities, better enabling them to educate the public and policy-makers about the importance of healthy soils
- Farmer surveys, focus groups, conversations, and meetings which inform the creation of state healthy soils and climate plans
- Writing and publishing op-eds about soil health from a farmer’s perspective in local papers
- Tabling events, movie showings, and listening sessions to engage rural farming communities on healthy soils
- Farm tours (and virtual farm tours during the pandemic), “soil crawls,” and statewide tours of soil health ambassadors in order to raise awareness of the importance of soil health and develop new leaders in the soil health movement

All members of the National Network are able to benefit from the mini-grants. Even those who have not received direct funding through our mini-grants have noted the wealth of inspiration and ideas they gain from their peers during our annual “mini-grant report back” meetings. In these meetings, members explain how their campaigns were enhanced by the grants and share lessons learned along the way.

“The main benefit I receive from being a Network member is inspiration. It’s very interesting to see the many different approaches and creative solutions that vary so much from state to state.”

– Isabelle Jenniches,  
New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group



Photo provided by Pasa Sustainable Agriculture.

## PROFILE:

**The Illinois Stewardship Alliance (The Alliance)**, an original member of the National Network, has taken advantage of the mini-grants program each year since 2019. Some of the activities used by the Alliance and supported in part with funding from the National Network include organizing three annual Soil Health Weeks of education and advocacy, establishing a farmer-led Soil Health Caucus, and organizing farmer listening sessions focused on soil health, water quality, and climate. They were also able to craft farmer-authored op-eds to be published in local papers, which proved critical to their campaign.

In 2019, in partnership with American Farmland Trust and other organizations, the Alliance successfully advocated for a state program to give farmers voluntarily adopting cover crops a \$5 per acre reward on their crop insurance. State lawmakers passed a resolution in 2022 declaring the first full week of March each year as “Illinois Soil Health Week,” boosting visibility of the issue greatly (HJR0063 / SJR0044). In 2023, after three years of organizing, they saw the passage of a bill to create the Illinois Healthy Soils Initiative and direct state agencies to collaborate on an accelerated soil health framework (SB 1701). A successful push on the FY2024 budget provided up to \$4 million for the new initiative (HB3817).



Image provided by Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

“The Network’s mini-grant funding provided us the opportunity to strengthen our soil health message, deepen relationships with farmers and partners across the state and host our second Annual Soil Health Week.

– Liz Rupel, Illinois Stewardship Alliance



# NATIONAL NETWORK RESOURCE LIBRARY

To aid in our effort to scale out state-level healthy soils policy, the National Network provides for synergistic collaboration among its members by maintaining an online resource library.

## The National Network Resource Library includes



## PROFILE:

### Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network (OrCAN)

Megan Kemple, Executive Director of OrCAN, one of the original members of the National Network, highlights the values they found in the connections and resources shared via the National Network.



OrCAN's farmer lobby day, Feb, 2020

OrCAN championed two soil health bills during the 2023 legislative session, the Oregon Healthy Soils Bill and Oregon's Natural Climate Solutions Bill. The Natural Climate Solutions Bill passed and allocated \$10 million for financial incentives and technical assistance to advance natural climate solutions on Oregon's natural and working lands including farms and ranches.

“ In late 2021, as OrCAN was preparing to advocate for Healthy Soils legislation, we compiled sample bill language, best practices and lessons learned shared by other member organizations. This included summaries and bill text for existing healthy soils legislation, definitions of soil health/ healthy soils from eight states, and best practices and lessons learned from other states shared in presentations by member organizations at Network meetings. Those resources were key as we developed Oregon's healthy soils bills and our campaign strategy.

– Megan Kemple, OrCAN

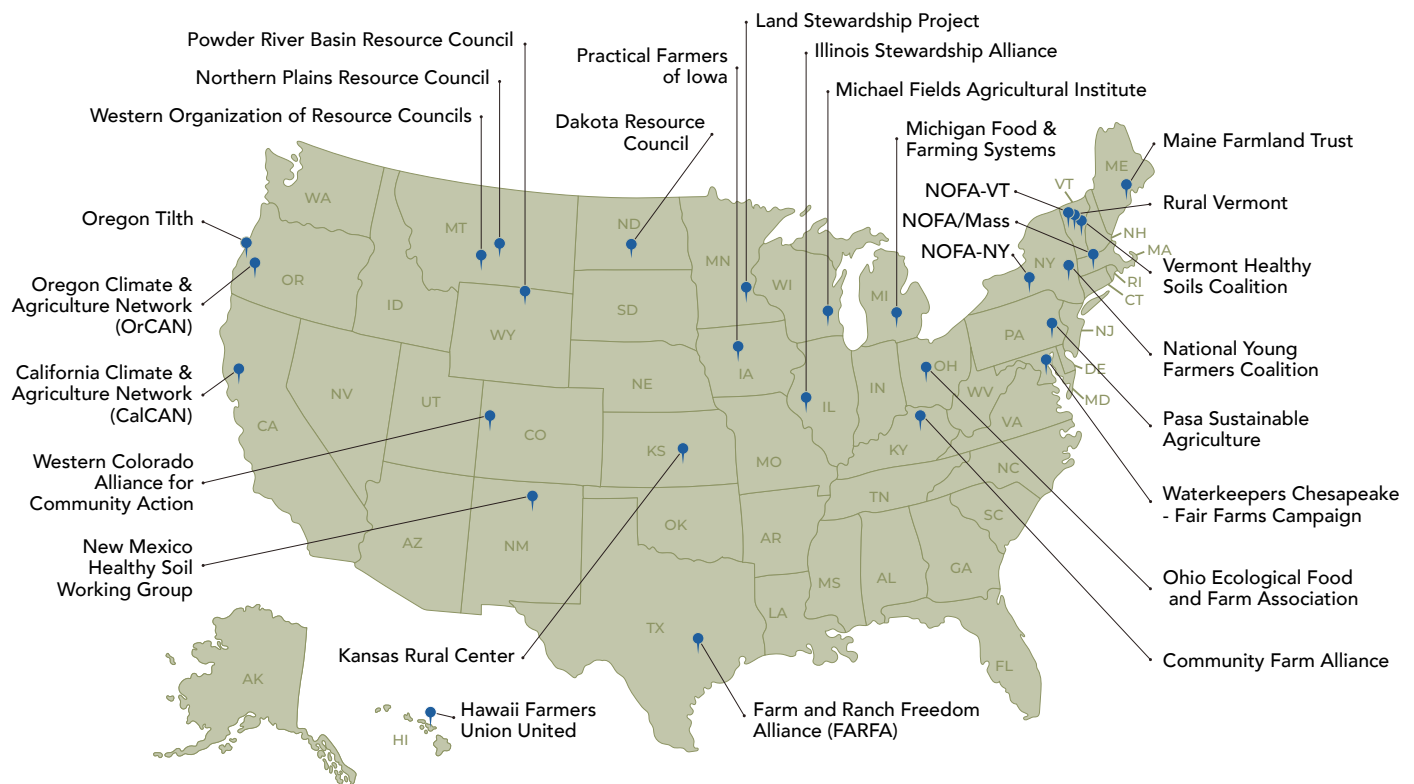




# NATIONAL NETWORK MEMBERSHIP AND GROWTH

Our members are the essence of the National Network, providing the relationships, connections and on-the-ground “eyes and ears” which inform the growth, priorities and nature of support provided by the National Network, via CalCAN staff. They form a community of practice, sharing inspiration and inquiry through regular gatherings and communication forums. They influence the direction and priorities of the National Network by participating in needs assessments, co-leading meetings and trainings, and engaging in priority-setting and strategic planning.

To be considered for membership, an entity must be a non-profit organization, a coalition, or a project of a non-profit with a mission to serve and support sustainable, organic, beginning, minority and/or family farmers with education, training, organizing, and/or policy advocacy. They must have capacity and commitment to engage in state and/or federal agriculture policy and be able to appoint a consistent representative to the National Network.



In 2018, the first year of the National Network, we had 14 farmer-serving member organizations and coalitions representing producers in 13 states. By the end of 2023, the National Network grew to include 28 member organizations expanding our collective reach across more than half of the states in the country.

## “WHAT’S NEXT?” CHALLENGES AND GROWTH AREAS

The immense imperative to address the climate crisis and increase climate resilience of farms and ranches around the world is becoming increasingly apparent to more and more people and policymakers. Even conservative ranchers and farmers who doubt the causes of climate change are talking about the impacts such as extreme flooding, catastrophic wildfires, historic heat events, record-setting drought and water scarcity, new and rapidly changing pests and diseases, and the unpredictability of weather events. Climate change compounds the already difficult barriers experienced by limited-resource farmers, farmers of color, women farmers and new farmers caused by systemic discrimination, barriers to accessing land, and a consolidated industry and marketplace. Farmworkers are on the front lines of these impacts and face both dangers to their health and the health of their families and also employment insecurity. The healthy soils movement has its work cut out.

This Five-Year Impact Report was produced to take stock of the work of the National Healthy Soils Policy Network over our first five years and to set the stage for a strategic planning process in which we will explore potential areas for network growth and development. Previous group visioning sessions and one-on-one conversations with members have surfaced several challenges and growth areas to consider. What follows is a snapshot of several prominent themes to be explored in greater detail.



“Membership in the National Network has given me steady inspiration, the chance to learn from others who are struggling with the same issues, and even financial support for my organization’s work on soil health policy!”

-Elizabeth Henderson, NOFA-NY

Early Morning Orchard in Palisade, CO. Photo provided by Western Colorado Alliance



## Inclusive National Network Growth

As a network of predominantly white-led sustainable and organic agriculture organizations serving predominantly white farmers, we share resources and approaches for how to advance policies that advance racial and economic justice. We are all on a learning journey about how to talk with white farmers and ranchers about structural inequity in agriculture.

Members have long expressed a desire to see representation within the National Network from BIPOC-led organizations. We embrace this goal and strive to proceed with integrity as we attempt to make the National Network more accessible and relevant for agricultural advocacy groups centering the needs of BIPOC producers.

Such efforts may build on and expand on existing efforts to:

- Curate and bring forward examples of equity-centered healthy soils policy approaches
- Create spaces for National Network members to support and challenge each other to continually improve their efforts to do anti-racism work
- Share resources and best practices related to equity work (creating inclusive organizational culture and programs, etc.)
- Offer forums to hear from BIPOC-serving organizations about their approach to climate and healthy soils work

*“The opportunity to learn from other states doing similar work in depth is extremely valuable. The network itself is very valuable, and the willingness of colleagues to share their successes and even failures.”*

- Sara Nicholas, Pasa Sustainable Agriculture

## Improved Resource Curation

As the National Network has grown organically over the past five years, so has the breadth and diversity of resources and wisdom shared through our numerous meetings and presentations. A greater focus on content curation will allow us to make the best use of the collective genius of our network.

A Living Healthy Soils Policy Knowledge Base could include:

- A repository of “lessons learned” and “best practices” shared by members over time
- Case studies of successful campaigns and program implementation (as well as “learning moments”)
- Model language, definitions and program design elements endorsed by the National Network
- Tracking the state of on-the-ground soil health practices and assessment tools
- The scientific data on measurement, monitoring, and evaluation of healthy soils practices to ground effective policy development and implementation



## Peer Mentorship Development

Several fruitful peer mentor relationships have emerged through chance interaction at National Network meetings and exchanges on our Google Group. The synergy of collaboration among members will be enhanced by greater capacity on the part of CalCAN staff to intentionally make connections among members.

Such efforts may include:

- Identification and tracking of common challenges and organizing landscapes
- A member directory delineating particular member skill sets, content expertise and connections
- Formation of topical groups to provide space for collective problem solving around specific technical topics or organizing demographics (e.g., messaging for conservatives, rural organizing)

## Communications and Narrative Development

Our member organizations are operating within widely varied socio-economic and socio-political and environmental landscapes. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to how we communicate and advocate for farmer-led soil health solutions. There are several potential avenues for the National Network to explore in an effort to facilitate coordinated and effective member communications, including:

- Production of messaging materials for targeted demographics
- Tracking of opposition groups and their arguments/concerns and potential responses
- Identifying sources of information which are most trusted by farmers and legislators
- Continued media training for organizers
- Grants to fund media consultants on particular campaigns
- Tools for the identification of shared values as a basis for narrative change

## Presenting A Unified Front Against False Solutions

As we work to give farmers the tools and support they need to implement real soil solutions, our members increasingly find themselves contending with “greenwashing” and false solutions promoted by the conventional agriculture lobby groups as well as some international environmental groups. A coordinated campaign to track and spotlight such threats and to pursue consensus among members on such topics as carbon markets will allow us to leverage our extended grassroots networks in order to maintain the integrity of the healthy soils movement.

