CAREER PROFILE

SOIL HEALTH & CONSERVATION SCIENTIST

Heal the ground beneath our feet—for healthy soil, plants, animals, and humans.

WHAT IT IS

Imagine turning worn-out, damaged soil into healthy soil that grows food and fights climate change. Soil health and conservation scientists do just that by restoring degraded soils, preventing erosion, and turning farmland into carbon-storing ecosystems. As a soil health and conservation scientist, you will use soil science, plant science, ecology, and hydrology to address climate change while helping farmers produce food sustainably. This isn't just preservation—it's regeneration. Your work rebuilds soil depleted by intensive agriculture.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

As a soil health and conservation scientist, your work blends fieldwork, data analysis, and collaboration. Your day might include:

- Assessing soil health with testing and analysis
- Designing conservation plans addressing erosion, crop and water management, and nutrient strategies
- Meeting with farmers to discuss cover crops, crop rotations, reduced tillage, or nutrient management
- Reviewing aerial imagery to plan erosion control practices, conservation buffers, or other conservation practices
- Collecting and analyzing data tracking soil carbon, water quality, and productivity
- Presenting findings at producer meetings and writing technical reports or proposals

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READY FOR SUCCESS

Your success begins with curiosity about soil, water, and ecosystems. Build a foundation in soil science, crop science, ecology, and hydrology. Develop strong problem-solving skills, systems thinking, and the ability to communicate science to farmers and policymakers. Be comfortable outdoors, patient with long-term projects, and ready to tackle site-specific challenges. Mentors, field experiences, and internships will accelerate your learning. Your work improves soil, water, climate, and food systems—impact you can see.

EDUCATION REQUIRED

This career is rooted in soil, water, and conservation science. **Most soil health and conservation scientists earn a bachelor's degree in:**

- **Soil Science**
- **Agronomy**
- **Environmental Science**
- **Natural Resources**

Advanced roles often require a master's degree. Coursework emphasizes soil physics, chemistry, biology, conservation, and hydrology. Internships with NRCS, conservation districts, or environmental organizations are essential. Professional certification is available through the Soil Science Society of America and the American Society of Agronomy.

GETTING STARTED

Excel in biology, chemistry, earth science, and math. Seek internships with Natural Resources Conservation Service or Soil and Water Conservation districts. Join soil judging teams. Volunteer for watershed restoration. Research universities with strong soil science programs. Build relationships with conservation professionals.

GROW BY **3%** UNTIL 2034

JOB OUTLOOK

Overall employment of conservation scientists and foresters is projected to grow 3 percent from 2024 to 2034.

$68K AS OF 2024

AVERAGE SALARY

The median annual wage for conservation scientists was $67,950 in May 2024, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.