

STATE OF NEW YORK

4722--A

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

February 10, 2021

Introduced by Sens. HINCHEY, MAY -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Agriculture -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee

AN ACT to amend the agriculture and markets law and the soil and water conservation districts law, in relation to establishing the soil health and climate resiliency act

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "soil
2 health and climate resiliency act".

3 § 2. The agriculture and markets law is amended by adding a new arti-
4 cle 11-B to read as follows:

ARTICLE 11-B

SOIL HEALTH AND CLIMATE RESILIENCY

Section 151-l. Definitions.

8 151-m. Soil health initiative.

9 151-n. Climate resilient farming initiative.

10 151-o. Soil health research.

11 § 151-l. Definitions. As used in this article: 1. "Soil health" means
12 soils that have the continuing capacity to function as a vital, living
13 ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. The benefits of
14 healthy soil include: supporting the production of food, feed, fiber,
15 and fuel; facilitating infiltration, storage and filtration of water and
16 protecting water quality; enhanced nutrient-holding capacity and nutri-
17 ent cycling; providing habitat for diverse soil organisms; enhanced
18 resilience to drought, extreme precipitation events, temperature
19 extremes, pests, diseases and other stresses; breaking down harmful
20 chemicals; reducing agricultural impacts on, and mitigating the impact
21 on agriculture of, global climate change; and sequestering carbon and
22 net long-term greenhouse gas benefits.

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 2. "Soil health practices" means agricultural and land management
2 practices that improve the function of soils through actions that follow
3 the principles of: minimizing soil disturbance from soil preparation;
4 maximizing soil vegetation cover; maximizing the diversity of beneficial
5 soil organisms; maximizing presence of living roots; and integrating
6 animals into land management; and in support of such principles, include
7 such practices as conservation tillage or no-till, cover-cropping,
8 precision nitrogen and phosphorous application, planned rotational graz-
9 ing, integrated crop-livestock systems, agroforestry, perennial crops,
10 integrated pest management, nutrient best management practices, and
11 those practices recommended by the United States Department of Agricul-
12 ture Natural Resources Conservation Service and that are supported by
13 the state soil and water conservation committee.

14 § 151-m. Soil health initiative. 1. The department, in cooperation
15 with the state soil and water conservation committee, and other partners
16 working on soil health shall encourage agricultural producers in urban,
17 suburban and rural communities to improve and maintain the health of
18 farm soils by: managing and optimizing soil health to mitigate and adapt
19 to climate change, and improve water quality while improving long term
20 soil productivity, efficiency, resiliency and profitability of farming;
21 ensuring that soil is conserved as a living ecosystem managed to provide
22 nutrients for the growth of agricultural plants and animals and a heal-
23 thy, affordable food supply; and addressing such environmental impacts
24 from farm operations, including, but not limited to absorbing and hold-
25 ing rainwater for use during dry periods, filtering and buffering poten-
26 tial pollutants from leaving fields, improving climate resiliency, and
27 providing habitat for beneficial soil microbes to flourish and diversi-
28 fy. Such improvement and maintenance shall account for the differences
29 in soils in different regions of the state. The department shall coor-
30 ordinate the soil health initiative with the agricultural environmental
31 management program established in article eleven-A of this chapter and
32 section eleven of the soil and water conservation districts law.

33 2. The department shall encourage soil health practices that include,
34 but shall not be limited to:

35 (a) improving, enhancing, or otherwise maximizing soil health and
36 quality, and minimizing soil erosion and sedimentation;

37 (b) improving, enhancing, or otherwise maximizing water infiltration
38 rates and water holding capacities of soils for improved storm water
39 management and flood control, drought resilience, and groundwater
40 supply; and

41 (c) managing and enhancing the healthy cycling of nutrients within
42 fields, to minimize nutrient runoff and reduce downstream nutrient load-
43 ing, improve watershed health and reliable water availability, restore
44 and enhance wildlife habitat, and manage water runoff and drainage water
45 for improved local and downstream water quality.

46 3. The department, in the development of efforts to promote and
47 encourage soil health, shall conduct public virtually accessible stake-
48 holder meetings and provide opportunity for written public comment and
49 consult with stakeholders, as appropriate, including, but not limited
50 to: the state soil and water conservation committee, the department of
51 environmental conservation, agricultural producers including histor-
52 ically marginalized producers, not-for-profit conservation organiza-
53 tions, environmental protection organizations including environmental
54 justice, the United States Department of Agriculture's National
55 Resources Conservation Services, the New York state college of agricul-
56 ture and life sciences established in section fifty-seven hundred twelve

1 of the education law including Cornell Cooperative Extension, other
2 institutions of higher education in New York state working on soil
3 health, and any other organization designated by the commissioner.

4 4. The department, in cooperation with the state soil and water
5 conservation committee, the New York state college of agriculture and
6 life sciences established in section fifty-seven hundred twelve of the
7 education law, and with input from other organizations with expertise in
8 soil health and regional stakeholders, shall establish appropriate
9 voluntary standards and objectives for soil health and quality, reflec-
10 tive of the different geographic regions, soil types, and farming oper-
11 ations. Such standards should include soil quality indicators for
12 biological, physical, and chemical properties of soil and reflect the
13 latest scientific advancements.

14 § 151-n. Climate resilient farming initiative. 1. The department, in
15 cooperation with the state soil and water conservation committee, and
16 other partners working on climate resilient farming shall encourage
17 agricultural producers in urban, suburban and rural communities to
18 reduce the effects of farming on climate change, such as greenhouse gas
19 emissions, and adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change by
20 improving and maintaining water management systems and soil health and
21 resiliency.

22 2. The department shall promote best management practices for climate
23 mitigation and soil resiliency, as informed by state policy, by the
24 United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation
25 Service Field Office Technical Guide and by research conducted by New
26 York state institutions of higher education with expertise in soil
27 health, and approved by the New York state soil and water conservation
28 committee.

29 3. The department shall coordinate the climate resilient farming
30 initiative with the agricultural environmental management program estab-
31 lished in article eleven-A of this chapter and section eleven of the
32 soil and water conservation districts law.

33 § 151-o. Soil health research. The commissioner shall make available
34 practical information from soil health research to agricultural produc-
35 ers in urban, suburban and rural communities with goals to: continue
36 accelerating the percentage of farmers who actively utilize best manage-
37 ment practices to foster soil health and resiliency; and, promote scien-
38 tific understanding of soil health and carbon sequestration with various
39 farming practices, including but not limited to no-till, cover cropping,
40 managed grazing, perennial pasture, and precise application of added
41 nutrients to achieve nitrous oxide emissions reduction.

42 § 3. Subdivision 2 of section 2 of the soil and water conservation
43 districts law is renumbered subdivision 3 and a new subdivision 2 is
44 added to read as follows:

45 (2) Promotion of soil health and resiliency. It is further declared
46 the policy of the legislature to promote the health and resiliency of
47 New York's agricultural soils, including the biological, physical, and
48 chemical components of such soils, to sustain agricultural plants and
49 animals, produce a healthy, affordable food supply, promote climate
50 resilient farming and the reduction of agricultural greenhouse gas emis-
51 sions, and further protect and promote natural resources and the health,
52 safety and welfare of the people of this state.

53 § 4. Paragraph i of subdivision 4 of section 4 of the soil and water
54 conservation districts law, as added by chapter 136 of the laws of 2000,
55 is amended and a new paragraph j is added to read as follows:

1 i. To coordinate and approve the participation of the several
2 districts in the AEM program as set forth in article eleven-A of the
3 agriculture and markets law[~~+~~];

4 j. To coordinate and approve the participation of the several
5 districts in support of soil health and climate resilient farming as set
6 forth in article eleven-B of the agriculture and markets law.

7 § 5. This act shall take effect July 1, 2021.