

Wrangler, FFA Team Up on Soil Health

One-day conference explains the importance of soil health for cotton and agroecology.

By Bart King

Why does a denim brand care about soil health and farming?

This is the question that initially occurred to some of the FFA students who attended a one-day conference last month at Wrangler headquarters in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Wrangler has been a corporate sponsor of FFA for more than 50 years, but this is the first time the organizations have worked together to organize an educational event around a single topic.

Roian Atwood, Wrangler's sustainability director—and the person who initiated the event—addressed the question as soon as he took the stage. “Roughly 50 percent of the cotton that’s in our products comes from U.S. cotton farmers,” he explained to the roomful of high school and college students, who represent the future of the agro-industry. “How can we continue to support and promote the vitality of cotton growing in the U.S., but also the use of sustainable best practices.”

Over the course of the day, presenters from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), researchers and innovative farmers explained how cultivating soil health is the key to sustainable, regenerative agriculture. Students learned about how emerging, on-farm practices are improving the yield and economics of agriculture, while simultaneously improving the health of ecosystems on and around farmland. For example:

- **No-till farming** increases soil fertility and water infiltration.
- **Cover crops** like alfalfa and clover restore soil nutrients and control erosion between commercial plantings.
- **Crop rotation** improves yields by alternating between plants that have different nutrient needs and soil benefits.
- **Rotational grazing** builds soil organic matter, biodiversity and livestock health by exposing small sections of pasture to short periods of intensive grazing followed by extended regrowth.

John Clark, an agroecology student at N.C. State University, perhaps summed it up best, “If we can produce more cotton, better cotton, then Wrangler’s going to be able to make better products. Products that are going to cloth people better and that are

going to be more sustainable, so that we can continue to conserve our resources. So that we can keep producing things for as long as we all live.”

Following the success of this conference, Wrangler is exploring ways to bring the message of soil health to more FFA youth and the broader public.

“The pillars of Wrangler’s sustainability platform include taking care of the land and the industry,” said Atwood. “As a major purchaser of cotton and a trusted brand in farming communities, we have an opportunity to help accelerate the adoption of these practices that are beneficial to the environment, farmers and the apparel industry.”

About the author

Bart King works with Wrangler and other environmentally and socially responsible clients to tell their stories.

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