

SANTA FE – The New Mexico State Land Office and the NM Healthy Soil Working Group teamed up to offer a series of informative webinars for state trust land agricultural lessees and the greater agricultural community. The second in the series was held Nov. 10 on Zoom on the topic of “Greater Profitability through Soil Health.” It featured Gregg Simonds of Open Range Consulting.

The State Land Office leases nearly 9 million acres of state trust land to ranchers, farmers, and agricultural producers across the state. The webinar series with the Healthy Soils Working Group is part of a continued engagement effort to provide soil health resources and information to nearly 3,500 grazing lessees.

“My family operated ranches on the eastern plains and northern mountains of New Mexico, and I understand that these operations can, at times, be under a lot of strain,” Commissioner Garcia Richard said. “Whether it is drought and climate change, or changes in production prices, or just keeping up with new science — we want our agricultural lessees to know that we care about them and want to help them succeed at every turn.”

Gregg Simonds is known for his critical work with ranchers and government agencies to find common solutions toward healthy lands and economically viable cattle operations.

He developed cutting edge land monitoring methods using remote sensing technologies to provide a statistically valid and economically feasible means to assess rangeland and riparian habitats. As part of the Humboldt Ranch management team in Elko, Nev., Simonds has embraced the opportunity to work with state and federal agencies, and other partners, to manage the ranch for profitable livestock production while providing habitat for fish and wildlife and recreational opportunities for the public.

“I believe that the next step for conservation is to bring it into the marketplace,” Simonds said. “There’s the notion that soil health is important, but we need the technology to underpin the market and create trust between buyer and seller. Measuring bare ground is a simple and effective metric for soil health that determines how well you manage it and how well you can market it.”

Making the business case for soil health

Written by Staff Reports

Thursday, 19 November 2020 15:50

Earlier this year, the Healthy Soil Working Group released a report prepared by the Crossroads Resource Center analyzing statewide data on agricultural income, production expenses, personal income, and health. The study New Mexico Farm & Food Economy found that over the last 50 years New Mexico farmers spent \$14 billion more on animal feed than they sold, and \$10 billion buying agrochemicals, petroleum products and agricultural inputs sourced out of state each year.

Due to these ever increasing costs, there has been no gain in net cash income for farmers over the last 50 years — 70% of New Mexico farms and ranches report a net loss. The webinar was designed to demonstrate that building soil health is an opportunity to gain independence from costly inputs and makes good business sense, with co-benefits for environmental and human health.

“We have an opportunity to meld hunger mitigation, environmental resilience and economic development by redirecting dollars spent on costly inputs from out-of-state and investing instead in soil health,” Christina Allday-Bondy, Co-founder of the New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group, said.

The State Land office collaboration with the NM Healthy Soil Working Group is not the first instance of the agency engaging with other organizations to offer informative webinars to agricultural lessees. Three drought-related webinars took place in the summer of 2020 in partnership with the Quivira Coalition, the Coalition to Enhance Working Lands, and the Western Landowners Alliance.

Under the leadership of Commissioner of Public Lands Stephanie Garcia Richard, the New Mexico State Land Office has seen back-to-back years of revenue over \$1 billion. Over 13 million acres of state trust land are leased for a variety of uses, including ranching and farming, renewable energy, business development, mineral development, and outdoor recreation. The money earned from leasing activity supports 22 beneficiaries — New Mexico public schools, seven universities and colleges, the School for the Deaf, the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospital, water and land conservation projects, and public building construction and repair.

The NM Healthy Soil Working Group is committed to the success of the state’s farmers and ranchers, knowing that building soil health creates co-benefits including rural and state economic gains, water availability and quality, more nutrient dense food leading to better public

Making the business case for soil health

Written by Staff Reports

Thursday, 19 November 2020 15:50

health, carbon drawdown and other key ecological services. Formed in the fall of 2018, the Working Group succeeded in passing the New Mexico Healthy Soil Act by assembling an extensive coalition of hundreds of food and agriculture-related organizations, farms and ranches, consumers, health practitioners and environmental groups.

Staff Reports