



# Building Soils for Better Crops: Organic Matter Management (Our Sustainable Future)

*Fred Magdoff*

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Farmers and gardeners face all sorts of difficulties in the course of growing crops—weeds and insect pests, low levels of fertility, lack of water, soil compaction, and erosion of topsoil. Usually seen as separate issues and dealt with individually, weeds, insects, nematodes, and plant diseases are controlled by pesticides; nutrient deficiencies are overcome through use of commercial fertilizers; drought stress is mitigated through irrigation; and compacted layers of soil are broken up by machinery. But all of these problems can be eliminated, or at least alleviated, by proper soil management that emphasizes organic matter build-up and maintenance.

At the forefront of a reawakening interest in sustainable agriculture, this book is written for farmers, gardeners, extension specialists, and others interested in the practical stewardship of our natural resources. Fred Magdoff, noted for his expertise in soil fertility, presents the latest information on soil organic matter and explains modern management techniques along with the best of the older practices. He opens with a discussion of the nature of organic matter and its function in the soil and then reviews practices for building up and maintaining soil organic matter, including reduced tillage, residue management, and crop rotations. A final selection offers an overview of the dynamics and chemistry of organic matter.

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