

Whole Cycle Tuesday

Takeaway

Organic matter should not be viewed as an expense, it should be viewed as an asset. Every increase in soil organic matter strengthens the foundation beneath our farms, landscapes, sports fields and communities by improving water management, nutrient efficiency, and soil resilience. Healthy soils generate returns that extend far beyond a single growing season, making organic matter one of the smartest long-term investments we can make.

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*"Nature does not hurry,
yet everything is
accomplished."*

— Lao Tzu

The Economics of Organic Matter: Why Healthy Soils Deliver

When discussing soil health, conversations often focus on biology, nutrient cycling, or crop production. While these are all important, there is another perspective that deserves equal attention: economics. Organic matter is not simply a measure of soil quality, it is a long-term investment that produces measurable financial returns. Whether you're managing farmland, maintaining municipal landscapes, constructing engineered soils, maintaining highly functioning sports fields, or restoring disturbed sites, increasing organic matter can lower costs, improve performance, and build resilience for years to come.

Although organic matter often represents only a small percentage of total soil volume, its impact is substantial. It improves the soil's physical, chemical, and biological properties, creating benefits that compound over time.

One of the greatest economic advantages of higher organic matter is improved water management. Soils rich in organic matter act like a sponge, absorbing rainfall and storing moisture for future plant use. During dry periods, this stored water reduces irrigation demands and helps plants withstand drought stress. During heavy storms, improved infiltration reduces runoff, erosion, and the loss of valuable topsoil.

Organic matter also improves nutrient efficiency. Healthy soils retain essential nutrients and release them gradually as plants need them, reducing nutrient losses and improving fertilizer performance. At the same time, thriving microbial communities recycle organic materials, build stable soil structure, and create better growing conditions for roots. The result is healthier plants, improved resilience, and more productive soils with fewer inputs.

Compost plays a critical role in this process. As one of the most effective sources of stable organic matter, quality compost contributes nutrients, beneficial microorganisms, and long-lasting organic compounds that continue improving soil structure, water-holding capacity, and biological activity long after application. Unlike many short-term soil amendments, compost delivers benefits that continue accumulating over time.

As environmental conditions become increasingly unpredictable, the value of organic matter continues to grow. Soils that hold more water, resist erosion, and support healthy biological activity are better equipped to withstand both drought and intense rainfall. Building organic matter is more than a soil management practice, it is an investment in long-term productivity, resilience, and environmental stewardship.

