The terms soil quality and soil health are currently used interchangeably in the scientific literature and popular press. In general, scientists prefer soil quality and farmers prefer soil health. Alternative agricultural institutes such as Rodale (PA) use soil quality and soil health without qualification (Haberern, 1992a,b). We favor using the joint term soil quality/health in the interest of promoting communication, knowledge sharing, and developing an understanding of the language and methods used to manage soil quality/health by farmers and scientists (Harris, 1992; Harris et al., 1992).

The need to develop methodology for characterizing soil quality/health is gaining increasing global recognition. At the international level, recent developments in soil quality/health include: (i) an international conference on “Assessment and Monitoring of Soil Quality” held in 1991 at the Rodale Institute in Pennsylvania (Papendick & Parr, 1992); (ii) an “International Workshop on Evaluation for Sustainable Land Management in the Developing World” held in Thailand in 1991, had as a topic highlight a paper on “Conservation and Enhancement of Soil Quality” (Larson & Pierce, 1991); (iii) the 7th International Soil Conservation Organization Conference held in Australia in 1992, with “People Protecting Their Land” as its theme, had a lead-off session focusing on the question, “How do we assess the health or condition of the land?”; (iv) the 1992 European Conference on Integrated Research for Soil Protection held in the Netherlands had a major session on “Assessment of Soil Quality and Soil Vulnerability”; and (v) The CSSS/CLRA/ISSS/ISATCC International Conference on “Environmental Soil Science” had four invited papers on “Criteria, Indicators and Applications of Soil Quality.” Recent national-level developments in soil quality/health include: (i) a university/federal research committee (NCR-59), based in the midwest but including nationwide representation, was reoriented in 1991 to focus on development and validation of methods for characterizing soil qual-