Soil Carbon Management

J.M. Kimble, C.W. Rice, D. Reed, S. Mooney, R.F. Follet, and R. Lal, Editors


Reviewed by Naomi Pena*

This book could provide a solid foundation for the development of agricultural policies due to the generally high quality of information on agricultural practices that can be used to manage and enhance soil carbon. The book’s 13 chapters cover a range of soil carbon issues and agricultural management regimes that enhance soil carbon while achieving additional, desirable environmental benefits. Specifically, the book deals with soil erosion and land degradation, advantages of management to increase soil carbon, and need for appropriate policies.

The core articles in this book—Chapters 3 through 8—provide high quality, balanced, informative summaries of agricultural management options that can provide benefits to farmers and the broader society. These chapters will be useful to students, teachers, scientifically oriented farmers, and researchers not familiar with the literature in topics covered. On Page 4 it is stated that “The book is written for a broad audience, including scientists, nonscientists, and policymakers.” However, with the exceptions of Chapters 11 and 12 and the first part of chapter 2, the information in the book is not suited to a general audience. The book’s usefulness to policymakers is quite limited due to the failure to connect core information to policy recommendations and to provide adequate background information and explanations for the policies suggested.

The book would have benefited from improved organization, a more balanced review of desirable management options, and more careful editing. Chapters 11 and 12, which provide general overviews of the subject, should have appeared early in the book rather than after numerous chapters devoted to more specialized subject matter. The book also seems overly focused on no-till and conservation tillage as management options particularly in light of the fact that information provided in various chapters suggests the utility of a wider range of effective options, including, cover crops, buffer strips, and terracing. The book would have been improved if editing had removed grammatical errors, a chapter that attempts to cover non-agricultural carbon issues, and the many virtually identical statements about the benefits of soil carbon that introduce most chapters.

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