

The Living Soil

Soil & Water Stewardship Week
April 25 – May 2, 2004

The 2004 Soil and Water Stewardship Week theme is “The Living Soil.” Each year the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and its 3000 local soil and water conservation districts celebrate this observance to help remind all citizens of their individual responsibility to care for soil and water resources on private land. Now in its 49th year, this special observance is built around a theme that ties ethical and spiritual values to practical land conservation practices.

This year the NACD Stewardship Advisory Committee—made up of members from the religious, educational, and conservation communities—has asked us to give careful consideration to the care of soil under our feet.

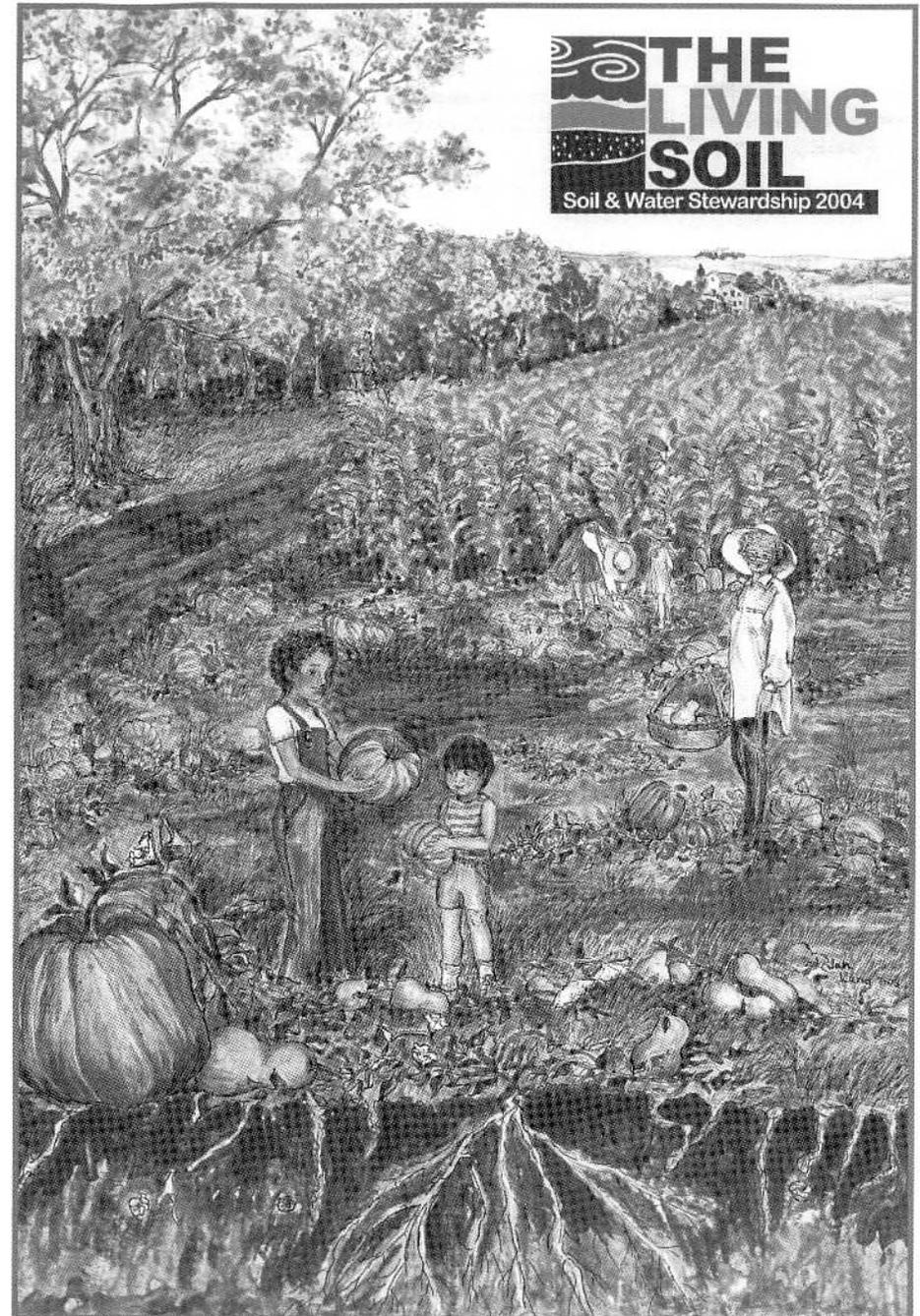
Millions of words have been written about the living soil. Many were scientific and factual, some were emotional and moving, others artistic and creative. But in generation after generation, it is important to bring attention back to the central theme—the living soil sustains all life on earth. Without the soil, nothing lives. Healthy soils support healthy environments, and healthy environments support healthy life.

As you walk across a field or down a forest pathway, your eyes and feet will give you messages about the soil. On your next walk, try to sense those messages. Is the soil hard, or does it feel spongy? Is it wet or dry? Look around you. What plants do you see? You may be surprised to learn that most soil has lots of open space below the surface—cracks, channels and pores between the solid grains of sand and soil and around growing plant roots.

You may also be surprised to learn that millions of beneficial organisms are going through their daily routine of eating, breathing, living, and dying in the soil. One cup of fertile soil may contain as many bacteria as there are people on Earth. In one acre—an area about the size of a football field—there may be a ton or more of microscopic bacteria. That’s equal to the weight of two full-grown cows!

We eat the food, drink the water, breathe the air, and enjoy the views, but only a few of us walk the fields and forests on a regular basis and understand what those lands need from us in order to sustain the living soil. However, here are a few things each of us can do in our own backyards to be better stewards of our soil resources:

- Protect the soil from damage by wind or water erosion by keeping healthy plants growing on the surface.
- Restore and maintain organic matter in soil, such as grass clippings or tree leaves.
- Protect and enhance soil life by using the least amounts and the least toxic materials to control pest problems on growing plants.



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Soil painting by Joe Lang with actual soil of various colors mixed with deer serym.

“Civilization itself rests upon the soil.”

— Thomas Jefferson