

## **ECN publishes new position paper on the role of compost and digestate in upcoming Soil Health Law**

The European Compost Network (ECN) has just launched its newest position paper concerning the role that waste-derived organic soil improvers and organic fertilisers play in restoring the ecological status of soil ecosystems. The paper aims to highlight the benefits that the use of high-quality compost and digestate brings to soil health, while also maintaining or enhancing its fertility and overall quality. These claims are further corroborated by data deriving from several long-term trials carried out in different areas of Europe.

2023 will be crucial for soil policy, as the flagship initiative of the Soil Strategy 2030, the proposal for a Soil health Law (SHL), will be adopted by the EU Commission in the first half of next year. Bio-waste, by virtue of its cross-sectorial nature, is also a potentially valuable resource to tackle the challenges that European soils are facing, which will be addressed in the forthcoming SHL. Moreover, the role played by compost and digestate in soil improvement will bring positive cascading effects and help achieve objectives set out in other EU initiatives, including the Biodiversity Strategy, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the climate objectives of the EU Green Deal.

The ECN is therefore calling on the Commission to consider the contribution that secondary products resulting from composting and anaerobic digestion processes of organic resources make in protecting, sustainably managing and restoring soils. Data analyses have proved that long-term applications of high-quality recycled organic soil improvers and fertilisers have led to several positive effects on soil health indicators considered in field studies. In particular, results show an increase in organic matter with consequent carbon sequestration and an increase in nutrient supply in soil. Contamination from heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants were also addressed, with no relevant accumulation detected. Moreover, ECN recommends including appropriate training for farmers on the long-term benefits of soil health and the practical ways of assessing its quality, while discouraging practices that only aim at carbon or organic matter while disregarding the specific soil use.

The position paper will be presented at the online event 'SOILS – WHERE FOOD BEGINS' organised by ECN together with VLACO on December 5th for the celebration of World Soil Day.

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