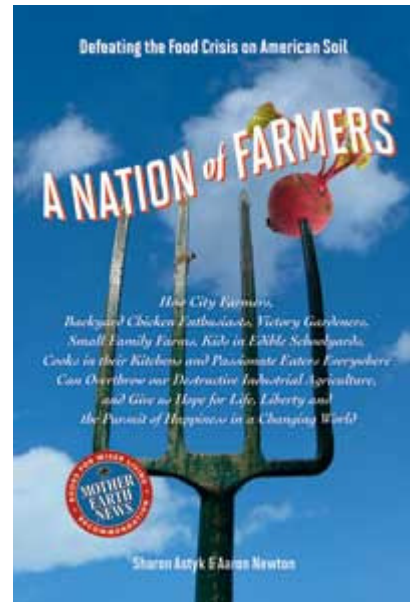


Compost to Combat Climate Change...

Excerpt taken from *A Nation of Farmers* by Sharon Astyk and Aaron Newton:

Besides the many ways that becoming a nation of farmers can reduce our carbon output, the practice of sustainable agriculture can actually reduce existing carbon in the atmosphere by raising the levels of soil humus. We do this every time we add compost or mulch to our ground, every time we choose not to till or plow, and leave soil undisturbed. For large-scale grain farming, UC Davis Professor Johan Six estimates the 80 to 200 million tons of carbon could be pulled out of the atmosphere and sequestered in the soil by the use of conservation tillage, which reduces soil disturbance and requires fewer tractors and less oil and gas. We could reduce carbon in the atmosphere at present by 5 percent or more simply by raising the level of humus in agricultural soils and reducing tillage. Doing so would also repair badly depleted farmland, damaged over the years by industrial agriculture.



More carbon still could be removed from the atmosphere if we were to raise the levels of humus in the millions of acres in the industrialized world that consist of back and front yards; public green spaces; office parks, church, synagogue and mosque grounds; and the White House lawn. The average residential home sits on slightly less than one quarter of an acre of land. By adding all the residential yards and commercial green spaces, public parks, etc., there are more than 7 million acres of green space in the US with soils that could be enriched to hold carbon.

What is needed... is simply a commitment to return organic material to the soil and to cease rototilling and plowing to disturb it. Instead, we would return all of our spare organic material – leaves, food scraps, animal manures, waste hay and straw, weeds that have not gone to seed - to our soil in the form of sheet mulch (that is, lots of dry material like straw or leaves spread over the ground and nitrogen-rich materials like manures, food scraps, coffee grounds and grass clippings mixed in) or as compost. Instead of tilling, we would plant directly into mulched ground. This keeps the carbon sequestered. As levels of soil humus rise over the years, more atmospheric carbon would be removed.

Every one of us with any soil can do this – your tiny backyard or your giant farm can reduce the impact of global warming that we've already created. And by growing food and living locally, you can cease putting food-related greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Growing your food may be the single most important way any of us can preserve the planet from climate change.