

# Maintaining Fertile Cropland

2013-10-05 11:42:37 By Gaia Rady

In a post-SHTF scenario or after TEOTWAWKI (The End Of The World As We Know It), farming and traditional agricultural skills will become more important than practically anything else. Everyone needs food, and living off the uncultivated land will not be practicable or sustainable after the initial chaos, panic and breakdown of society following whatever catastrophe has occurred. For long-term survival and sustainability of the land you're farming (i.e. if you want to be able to keep growing crops) proper crop rotation is a necessity.

## Crop Rotation

Modern agriculture has stripped most Americans far away from the farms that grow their food, but organic farmers, old-fashioned family farmers and those with an aversion to the overuse of synthetic fertilizers are familiar with the need for [crop rotation](#) and land management. Proper management ensures the long-term fertility and health of the land by building up and maintaining healthy soil, complex root structures, and by decreasing the pathogenic load.

In family gardens and multi-acre farms alike, good soil management and crop rotation or companion planting are essential tools for achieving maximum yield while maintaining the health and productivity of the land. Anyone who has ever maintained a garden or even some nice bushes in the yard should be familiar with how the quality of the nutrients in the soil degrades over time. Beautiful gardens full of vibrant, healthy bloom require a lot of upkeep at the roots.

## Nutrient Depletion& Renewal

Healthy crops are no different. Crops like corn, lettuce, tomatoes and cabbage tend to consume a lot of nitrogen from the soil they are planted in. So if you plant corn in the same field for several years in a row, the soil will become hugely depleted of nitrogen content. This means you also have to pay heed to the order that you plant crops when you rotate fields. Growing corn on a plot of land and then growing tomatoes will still result in serious nitrogen depletion.

{adinserte backyardliberty}When nutrients in the soil are depleted, you have a few options available. First, you can [add fertilizer to the soil](#) to increase specific nutrient levels. Currently, synthetic fertilizers are king in the big agriculture business. Without synthetic fertilizers, most farms could not continue to produce crops; the way they have farmed the land has simply become totally unsustainable without constant reapplication of synthetic fertilizers.

In addition to synthetic fertilizers, there are many professional companies who produce various [organic fertilizers](#). Organic fertilizers range from bat guano, worm castings and rotted horse manure to goat, sheep and chicken manure, blood meal, bone meal, and seaweed. Many farms, especially old-fashioned family farms, have opted for a more organic approach to their fertilizer needs. But what happens if your access to even organic fertilizer is very limited or nonexistent?

Farming without some form of fertilizer to periodically enrich the soil is definitely not ideal, but it can be done and if you manage your land carefully you can still be productive. This is where crop rotation is most important, because you'll be moving crops around not just to avoid over-draining the nutrients in one area, but also in an effort to restore nutrients. For the best management, you'll need

to look at what sort of nutrients your crops are consuming or putting back in the soil.

As I mentioned, corn, lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, and peppers will all deplete the soil of nitrogen. Crops within the legume family, by contrast, are renowned as nitrogen fixing plants. These include soybeans, peanuts, many types of beans, and notably alfalfa and clover which can serve as animal feed in their own right. Because of its great nitrogen fixing capabilities, clover is an immensely popular cover crop for fields that are not in use for other crops.

Additional benefits of crop rotation or companion growing include the decreased viral and bacteriological load that is present in the soil. Like humans and animals, plants and crops are susceptible to infection from fungus, mold, bacteria and certain pests. Many of these fungi, bacteria or pests specialize in a certain plant (e.g. potatoes), so growing something different each year will cut down on the ability of pathogens to build up in the soil around their host plants.

### Fallow Fields: Resting the Land

With a good system of crop rotation, and especially with the addition of any sort of fertilizer you may be able to come up with, it's possible to grow crops on a plot of land for upwards of 2 – 3 years at a time with good results. Ultimately, though, you must let the land rest if you hope to continue farming there in the long-run. Allowing a plot of land to rest for a period of time is known as letting the field go fallow, and there are several reasons for this.

Allowing a field or plot to lie fallow means that you don't grow anything new on it, don't harvest anything and don't graze any animals on the land for at least a year. Sometimes a field will lay fallow for two, three or even four years, but the traditional standard on many farms was to let a field lie fallow once every 2 – 3 years.

This fallow period allows the land to replenish many of its nutrients. The root networks of various grasses or groundcovers (like clover) have a chance to expand and grow, which further strengthens the soil and protects it from erosion.

During the fallow period, there are many beneficial flora and micro-fauna, including cyanobacteria, which live in the soil. These microorganisms continue to be active at the root level, steadily improving the quality of the soil so that when you come back in a year or two, you can begin planting food or cash crops anew.

### Animals & Agriculture

If there were ever two things made to go together, animal husbandry and agriculture are something of a pair of divine companions. Livestock such as chickens, ducks, geese, goats, sheep, cows and horses are all natural fertilizer machines. Indeed, some breeds of sheep and goats have been especially popular throughout history simply because their manure is so great. Now that's some black gold.

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