



SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

Southwest Soil Survey Region

Tucson, Arizona, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Office (SSO)

13th Annual Future Farmers of America Chile Field Day

Purpose

On November 6, 2024, staff members from the Tucson, Arizona, MLRA SSO and the Willcox NRCS office participated in a Future Farmers of America (FFA) event hosted by Curry Farms in southeastern Arizona. Staff members presented and lectured about soil science, soil fertility, and soil management at a soil pit as one part of the testing and judging event. FFA students from across Arizona attended the event. The Tucson MLRA SSO staff member provided information about the importance of soil science in farming chiles.

Background

Curry Farms is a farm outside of Sunsites, Arizona, that primarily grows chiles. Ed Curry runs the farm and has focused on developing new chile varieties through crossbreeding and selection. He has supported education of the next generation of farmers through FFA events on his farm, of which this was the 13th. This FFA event included presentations on topics such as plant breeding and genetics, soil science, chile production, plant pathology, and processing plant management. The Tucson MLRA SSO sent Ecological Site Specialist Michael Piotrowski to give the presentation on soil science to the FFA students in attendance (fig. 1). He was joined by Soil Conservationist Jerzi Hood, from the Willcox NRCS office. They showed the students how to texture soils, how soil forms, and what differences in soil properties mean for water availability and chile farming. Later, the students took a test on the information provided by the different presentations, and high-scoring students received awards. There was also a chile-eating competition in which willing FFA students ate progressively hotter chiles until only four students remained.



Figure 1.—Michael Piotrowski (center, wearing the straw hat) teaches the gathered FFA students about soil science while standing around a soil pit.

Key Outcomes

The Tucson MLRA SSO provided information about soil science to interested students who are on track to become the next generation of agricultural leaders. By teaching them about the importance of soil conservation and soil science, these future industry leaders will be better equipped to make informed decisions about their natural resources. Piotrowski and Hood worked collaboratively with the state side of the NRCS and local farmers to better market the Soil and Plant Science Division's mission and expertise, which will allow staff to continue to work with interested parties in the area. Events like these make it easier for staff to connect with landowners and land managers for future projects.