

Federal Rangeland Compost Field Trial Underway in Sonoma County

Written by: Sonoma Resource Conservation District

It may have gone unnoticed by the traffic along Lakeville Highway but an exciting project has begun: a truckload of compost was spread on a test plot staged within the active grazing pasture at Sears Point Ranch, a large rangeland property owned by Sonoma Land Trust. This test plot is one of 15 plots established this month on ranches across the state that will evaluate if compost can improve soil health on California's diverse rangelands.

Previous research has already shown that applying as little as a half-inch layer of compost to grazed rangelands can increase carbon storage below ground and improve soil health parameters, including increases in productivity and soil water holding capacity. The goal of this research trial, coordinated by the Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and funded in part by local compost advocates John Wick and Peggy Rathmann, is to gather enough research data to support the use of federal Farm Bill funding to allow NRCS to pay for purchase of compost and encourage more ranchers to adopt this healthy soil practice through federal assistance programs. Sonoma RCD is one of several local partners providing technical support for this 3 to 5-year field experiment and is excited to assist in future data collection efforts at our local test plot.

