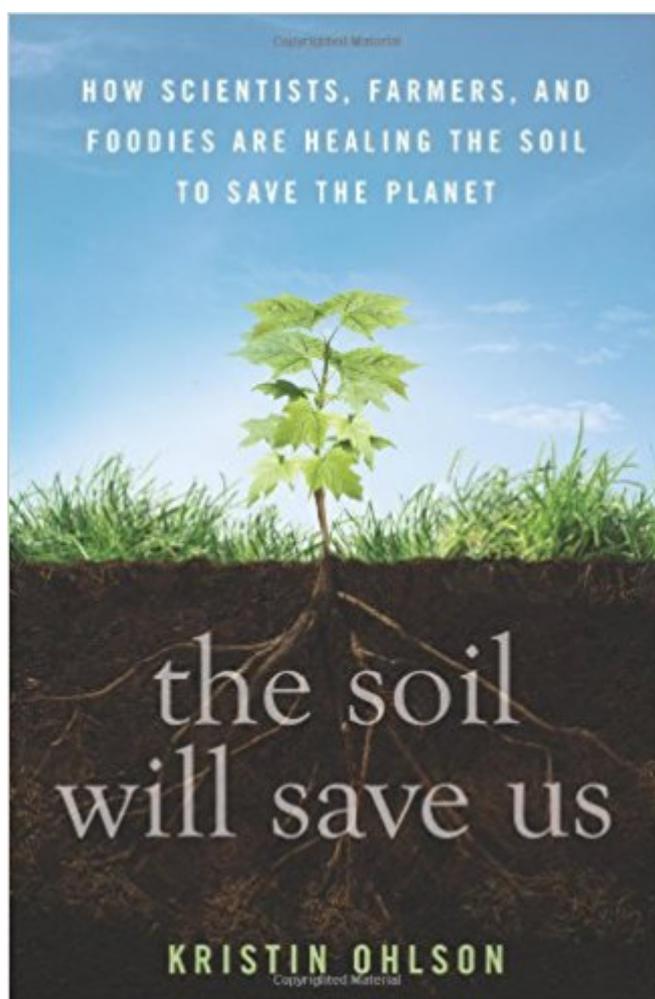


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The Soil Will Save Us: How Scientists, Farmers, And Foodies Are Healing The Soil To Save The Planet



Synopsis

Thousands of years of poor farming and ranching practices—and, especially, modern industrial agriculture—have led to the loss of up to 80 percent of carbon from the world's soils. That carbon is now floating in the atmosphere, and even if we stopped using fossil fuels today, it would continue warming the planet. In *The Soil Will Save Us*, journalist and bestselling author Kristin Ohlson makes an elegantly argued, passionate case for "our great green hope" a way in which we can not only heal the land but also turn atmospheric carbon into beneficial soil carbon and potentially reverse global warming. As the granddaughter of farmers and the daughter of avid gardeners, Ohlson has long had an appreciation for the soil. A chance conversation with a local chef led her to the crossroads of science, farming, food, and environmentalism and the discovery of the only significant way to remove carbon dioxide from the air—an ecological approach that tends not only to plants and animals but also to the vast population of underground microorganisms that fix carbon in the soil. Ohlson introduces the visionaries—scientists, farmers, ranchers, and landscapers—who are figuring out in the lab and on the ground how to build healthy soil, which solves myriad problems: drought, erosion, air and water pollution, and food quality, as well as climate change. Her discoveries and vivid storytelling will revolutionize the way we think about our food, our landscapes, our plants, and our relationship to Earth.

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Customer Reviews

"This will surely be called an important book. Ohlson conveys her information in the lively

manner of writers such as Michel Pollan and Rowan Jacobsen, making complicated ideas easily accessible to the reader, so that we see the ground at our feet not as dead dirt but rather as, in her words, a "coral reef" teeming with life, a "massive biological machine" on which the health of our species depends. We're lucky to have this account.

Michael Ruhlman, author of *The Soul of a Chef*: "On the long list of things we have to do to fight climate change, learning to pay attention to soil again is near the top. It's not just dirt, it's not just something that holds plants upright--as this book points out, it's pretty damned vital."

Bill McKibben, author of *Earth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*: "I was barely a dozen pages into *The Soil Will Save Us* when I felt the ground shifting under my feet--the literal ground, as in the composition of the rich humus of old-growth forests compared to the exhausted, scorched, and ruined ancient fields of global farming--and the psychic ground. This is a remarkable book, which tells--with a light touch and a breezy, readable manner--a story of modern science of the most crucial importance."

Melissa Fay Greene, author of *Praying for Sheetrock* and *There Is No Me Without You*: "At last, soil has been included in the conversation about food. And you don't need a degree in soil sciences to see how the web of life below the surface that infuses soil--is soil--is strongly affected by the various webs of life that occur aboveground, for better and worse. . . . This book is eminently readable, well-researched, and important."--Deborah Madison, author of *The New Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone*: "The *Soil Will Save Us* is a convincing argument that those of us who care about the environment have to start from the ground up--that is, if we are going to give a better world to our grandchildren, we're going to have to develop a deep interest in dirt. Fortunately, all you need to become fascinated by dirt is a book like this, which reveals just how intricate and important it is."

Nathanael Johnson, author of *All Natural*: "The author has a clear storytelling style, which comes in handy when drawing this head-turning portrait of lowly dirt. But dirt--or soil, if you prefer--takes on character in Ohlson's hands, and readers will soon become invested in its well-being, for soil is a planetary balancer, and from its goodness comes the food we eat....Ohlson ably delineates this promising situation: Vital soil may well help address climate change, but it absolutely will provide for "more productive farms, cleaner waterways, and overall healthier landscapes."

KIRKUS REVIEWS: "Kristin Ohlson's examination of how farming and forestry techniques might mitigate, if not resolve, global warming. We generally think of climate change as a story of sky -- of emitted gases, of atmospheric carbon levels, of storms. Author Kristin Ohlson would like to direct our gaze earthward, to take a long, hard look at the dirt beneath our feet. We may have overlooked a solution there...This is a hopeful book and a necessary one. *The Soil Will Save Us* is not the last

word on this subject but is a fast-paced and entertaining shot across the bow of mainstream thinking about land use. May a million new farms bloom. [The Los Angeles Times](#)

Kristin Ohlson is a writer based in Portland, OR. Her work has appeared in the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, Salon, Discover, and elsewhere. Her article about burning coal mines was collected in Best American Science Writing 2011. She is also the author of *Stalking the Divine*, which won the American Society of Journalists and Authors' 2004 Best Nonfiction Book award, and coauthor of New York Times bestseller *Kabul Beauty School*.

In reading "The Soil Will Save Us" it seemed to me that a better title would have been "How We Will Save the Soil". There is a lot of good information about soil conservation, but you don't find out until the last two pages about the potential impact of soil health on climate change -- and even those two pages seem have to be written almost as an afterthought. The information that the book presents on soil and climate is just the tip of the iceberg; for example, see the video [at http://rodaleinstitute.org/regenerative-organic-agriculture-and-climate-change/](http://rodaleinstitute.org/regenerative-organic-agriculture-and-climate-change/). The book is a good primer on the role of microbes -- fungi and bacteria -- in maintaining soil health and sequestering organic carbon. But it neglects other equally important soil conservation and sequestration methods such as remineralization. The author describes the hard clay in her back yard as an example of "soil with few microbial aggregates", but a soil test would probably pinpoint the problem as excess magnesium requiring addition of calcium to loosen the soil. Minerals are the stuff of which microbes are made, and soil fertility and plant health can be dramatically improved by addition of basalt rock dust or sea minerals. <http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/supercharge-your-soil-with-minerals-zbcz1411.aspx#axzz3JcWEptD0> The book discusses the role of livestock in soil remediation. This is a controversial topic, in part because cattle are a major source of atmospheric methane. But anaerobic digesters can perform the same function as cow's stomachs on an industrial scale, without methane emissions, while providing useful energy co-generation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eXRfynD-M8> The book also neglects biochar, one of the most effective mechanisms for permanently sequestering carbon, improving soil fertility, and creating liquid fuels: <http://climatestate.com/2014/02/17/biochar-the-next-stage-in-climate-action/> The book is a good introduction to soil and climate, but the interested reader should explore other information sources that better convey the full potential of land use for climate stabilization.

I haven't met a soil scientist that I didn't like. They are always quirky, hopeful, and passionate about what they study. It's probably that childlike connection to playing in the dirt... and the realization that it plays such a significant role in life. Although Ohlson is not a soil scientist, she is not stranger to digging deep into topics. I knew that this would be a good book to read when I picked it up, and as I read on, my conviction was supported. It is a quick read that will reach a mainstream audience, beyond those familiar with Ruth Stout (*Gardening Without Work*) and William Bryant Logan (*Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth*). If you are looking to learn about "new" carbon sequestering techniques, this book is a great introduction to composting, cover crops, no-till farming, and other very modern agro-ecological science. You'll be fascinated to learn how Gabe Brown of North Dakota (who I saw present at the 2012 Quivira Conference!) created 4-foot deep topsoil over his land by going back to the basics! This is a great book - read and pass along!

Another good book about the importance of the Soil and how destructive industrial farming really is. I am not a Global Warmer but am an organic farmer knowing our health has been drastically effected by the over abundance of chemicals used both in the soil and our food and medications.

This book suggests we have been looking at the environmental crisis all wrong. While it is indeed necessary to reduce carbon emissions, we also need to fully appreciate that the earth is alive, a very complex ecosystem with many feedback loops. There are many implications that flow from this, but one of the most immediately important is that by changing farming and ranching practices, we can take large amounts of carbon out of the atmosphere and safely sequester it in the soil, where it will have many other positive results, like reducing soil erosion, improving crop yields, and improving the health of the ecosystem. We can, indeed, save the earth by saving our soil.

We can do it. I know we can. One field at a time, we can save this planet. And we can start with one garden at a time. This is one of my favorite books because it made me realize that it's not all hopeless.

This book gets 5 stars because it is current, easy to read and relevant. It is just an overview that will give you names and concepts to research further. It will not tell you what to do on your farm. I have been a permaculture fan for 23 years and I have found some problems with soil tilling and hot composting. It was nice to read of people who have found the same problems and read of their

ideas and solutions. It will take me two to three years to read the primary works suggested in this book and see how those ideas work for me. I did find the book to be 'over selling' concepts, but it wasn't so bad that I was put off. It does mean though, that the book is a skimmer, with useful information coming in about once every 8 pages with the intervening words either setting the stage or selling the point. I also skipped the first 80 pages. It gets 5 stars because when it hits the point, it scores a bulls eye time and time again.

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