Soils around the world are in trouble, threatening food production. Here's how we can save the ground beneath our feet

Soil is critical for the food everyone eats. Healthy soils matter not just for producing 95% of global food supplies, but also for safeguarding other aspects of human health. Soils sequester a massive amount of carbon (over twice as much as the atmosphere and all plants combined). In addition, microbes in healthy soils lead to the development of antibiotics and other medicines.

So it's alarming that this foundation of food production and health is in trouble.

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Up to 40% of the world's agricultural land is degraded, and it's estimated that the economic losses amount to $40 billion (£30bn) per year. But almost all of the world's arable land is already being farmed.

But fairly simple techniques can make a big difference. In Ghana, planting elephant grass helps to hold soil together. In Burkina Faso, the zai (half moon) method involves farmers digging large holes in soil and putting in compost when rains are arriving in order to conserve water and soil. In India, using trenches and small walls during the rainy season helps to preserve nutrient-rich topsoil and prevent soil erosion.

Indeed, around the world farmers and scientists are working to invigorate soil where possible. And they're finding that sometimes the best solutions are the basic ones.

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