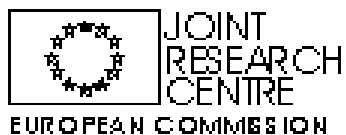


Soil Resources of Europe

by

P. Bullock, R.J.A. Jones, L. Montanarella (eds.)



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COVER MAPS: THE EUROPEAN SOIL DATABASE VERSION 1.0

Preface

Soil Surveys have been responsible for collecting and assembling information about the soils of Europe over many years. Initially, the surveys produced paper maps at various scales, identifying the spatial distribution of the different types of soils, and provided analyses defining the nature and properties of the main soil units. More recently there have been major advances in the construction of digital soil databases to which have been added related information on climate, geology, topography, hydrology and land use. The resulting land information systems provide data on soils and their interaction with these other facets of the environment for use in dealing with problems of pollutant transfer, soil degradation (e.g soil erosion), land contamination, and sustainable land use.

Each country of the European Union has supported soil surveys to a greater or lesser extent depending on the resources available. Soils have been analysed and databases compiled for national purposes and no two countries have adopted identical approaches or systems. In order to try to introduce a degree of uniformity of approach and to review developments and progress throughout Europe, the Heads of Soil Survey organisations met together at Silsoe, UK in 1989. The ensuing report of this Meeting (Hodgson, 1991) provided the first systematic examination of soil survey in the countries of the EU.

The value of the Silsoe meeting in identifying progress and uniformity, or lack thereof, prompted the decision to hold such meetings at approximately four-year intervals. Thus a follow-up meeting was held in Orleans, France in December 1994. The main theme of this meeting was 'Soil Databases' (Le Bas and Jamagne, 1996) because of the considerable progress that had been made in some countries since 1989. It was at the Orleans Meeting that the proposal for the creation of a European Soil Bureau by the Joint Research Centre, Ispra (I), was endorsed by the Heads of Soil Surveys. The Bureau was intended to be a formal association of the soil survey and soil data centres in the EU Member States as well as some neighbouring and accession countries. The European Soil Bureau was identified as the focal point for the provision and distribution of soil information throughout Europe, according to agreed standardised procedures

Since 1996, the European Soil Bureau has operated through a permanent Secretariat, and Advisory and Scientific Committees. This volume contains papers presented at the last Advisory Committee meeting held in Silsoe in April 1998. Its publication comes at a time when public interest in the status and condition of the continent's soils has significantly increased. The meeting included representatives of the EFTA countries and it reviewed progress in soil mapping, monitoring and database development. During the discussions, it became clear that the increased demand for soil information within each country has been matched by the requirements of the European Commission, and other international organisations such as the United Nations, concerned with steering global change in a sensible, sustainable way. No longer is information about soil resources purely a national issue.

The European Soil Bureau's Scientific Committee, comprising experts drawn from member states, has been particularly important in coordinating the production of the 1:1,000,000 scale soil geographical and associated databases. It has also developed a standard procedure for data distribution that has been endorsed by all the contributing organisations. The Advisory Committee, largely consisting of Heads of Soil Surveys (and data centres), continues to be the forum by which progress in soil mapping, monitoring and databases in countries of the European Union are periodically reviewed. The increasing demand for soil information in Europe calls for a strengthening of the European Soil Bureau and a continuing mandate to collect sufficient baseline information about the soils of Europe.

Peter Bullock
September 1999

EDITORS' NOTE

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Peter Bullock – Bob Jones – Luca Montanarella

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