SOIL ECOLOGY LABORATORY
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Sampling procedure

To ensure your soil or compost analysis provides accurate and reliable results, please follow this unified sampling procedure. These steps are designed to meet the requirements of any of our partner laboratories (Logan Labs, Regen Ag Labs, SEL Microscopy, or Biome Makers).

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1. Prepare Your Equipment

- **Tools:** Use a clean, rust-free soil probe, auger, spade, or shovel.
- **Sanitize:** For biological testing, wear gloves and sanitize your tools with ethanol, allowing them to dry between different sample areas.
- **Avoid Contamination:** Do not use lubricants like WD-40 on your tools, as they can cause inaccurate results.
- **Labels:** Use a permanent marker (like a Sharpie) to label your bags **before** you start sampling to prevent smearing.

2. Select Your Sampling Areas

- **Divide the Land:** Sample areas separately if they differ in soil type, appearance, crop growth, or past treatments (like different fertilizer or irrigation schedules).
- **Representative Sites:** Collect soil from areas that represent the field average. For uniform soils, one composite sample can cover roughly 1–2 acres.
- **Areas to Avoid:** Stay at least 50 feet away from barns, roads, or fence rows. Avoid livestock congregate areas, poorly drained spots, or places where fertilizer was recently spilled or banded.
- **Special Instructions for Pastures:** Aim halfway between the plant stem and its "drip line".

3. Collect the Samples

For Soil:

- **Clear the Surface:** Scrape away surface litter, vegetation, thatch, and residue before inserting your tool.
- **Depth:** Consistently sample to a depth of **6 inches** (or to your typical tillage depth).
- **The Method:**
    - **Probe/Auger:** Insert at a 90° angle, twist slightly, and pull straight out.

    - **Spade:** Dig a V-shaped hole, then cut a thin 1-inch slice of soil from one side.
- **Create a Composite:** Collect between **10 and 15 cores** (subsamples) from different locations within the same area.
- **Avoid plant matter:** Samples which go to our US lab partners need to be clear of plant matter to reduce time spent clearing the border control.

For Compost:

- **Small Batches:** Take a minimum of 5 samples from under the surface.
- **Large Windrows:** Take a minimum of 20 samples from throughout the pile.
- **Avoid Dry Spots:** Do not include dry surface material.

4. Mix and Package

- **Mix:** Thoroughly mix all cores/subsamples for that specific area together in a clean plastic bag or bucket to create one representative sample.
- **Volume Required:** * **Standard Testing:** Place approximately **2 cups (500ml)** of soil into a Ziploc or plastic-lined paper soil bag.
    - **Microscopy/Biological:** Ensure you have at least **200ml** of material.
- **Air for Microbes:** If you are requesting biological or microbial testing (SEL/Biome Makers), fill the bag only **halfway** to leave air for microbes to breathe.
- **No Paper Inside:** Do not put labels or submission forms inside the bag, as the paper acts as "microbial food" and will ruin the sample.

5. Labeling and Shipping

- **Bag Labels:** Clearly mark the outside of the bag with your name, address, date of sampling, and a unique Sample ID (e.g., "North Field 1").
- **Documentation:** Ensure the IDs on the bags match your **Submission Worksheet** exactly.
- **Storage:** If you cannot ship immediately, store samples in a cool, shaded location for up to 2 days, or in a fridge for up to 2 weeks. Use the freezer for longer delays.
- **Shipping:** Place samples and forms in a sturdy box. Use a standard carrier with **next-day or 2–3 day shipping**.
- **Shipping address:**
    - **Soil Ecology Laboratory**
    - **Unit 6, Down Farm, Odiham, Hook, RG29 1QX**

Note: Proper storage is critical—microbial activity can be significantly altered if samples get too warm or sit too long.