

A candid interview with Jerry Erickson — *SoilSoup founder and developer of SoilSoup technology and its products.*

What makes SoilSoup so unique?

The SoilSoup Bio-Blender and SoilSoup nutrients are a fast and easy way to gain all of the benefits the soil gets from compost. It is affordable to the person who has a one or two acre farm or even a back yard garden. I have spent a considerable amount of time working with organic farmers as well as with a biologist developing effective nutrient solutions that work and do not require large amounts of compost or long periods of time to brew a powerful compost tea. We have had wonderful results with many of the plant diseases seen each year in the Northwest.

What makes your compost teas so effective?

By adding our special nutrients to compost tea you are able to produce a greater quantity of microbes than were originally in the dry compost. The value of compost is the quantity of aerobic microbes present in the compost.

The Bio-Blender simply takes this process and moves it into a liquid process, rather than a dry process. The aeration created by the Bio-Blender along with the nutrients multiplies the number of microbes in the solution. You start out with a few thousand per teaspoonful and you end up with hundreds of millions per teaspoonful.



The true value of compost whether it's liquid or dry is the microbes that are put in the soil. They are the bottom of the food chain. When you feed the soil microbes, you're feeding the other critters in the soil as well. It's a complex and fascinating process.

How important is it that SoilSoup is environmentally sound?

Very important that's one of SoilSoup's greatest assets. We feel we have an obligation to take care of our planet. There's certainly been enough damage done and the earth needs to be repaired. I think what we're looking at is a way of gardening organically that doesn't cost any more than gardening inorganically and at the same time helps heal the planet.

By inorganic, you're referring to fertilizers?

Yes, I'm referring to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Healthy soil produces healthy plants and healthy plants produce healthy people. Right now, organic foods cost far more than non-organic foods. I'd like to see that change to the point where all foods are produced organically and at an affordable price.

How did you test it?

I started out with one prototype and worked with two organic growers on Bainbridge Island. One unit was just not enough for both farms, so I built the second prototype and started making all the compost teas for one of the growers who has a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm. Sometimes I would make a couple batches a week. He'd bring his rotor-tiller drawn sprayer down and fill up the tank with our SoilSoup Compost Tea. It took him only a half an hour to cover his entire two acres. He was able to spray the whole farm and even had some left over which he put into his drip irrigation system.

Before that, making compost was a very frenetic activity. He was spending a couple days a week making compost by going to get horse manure and various other materials. It seemed he was always

making compost. That's the common denominator among organic growers. They have this huge need for compost. According to the literature and input I have received from several farmers that grow crops, they use about 10 to 25 tons of compost per acre to fertilize properly.

What were the results of your tests?

Great crops! Last year the number of solar days was way down. The test farmer pumped up his corn's growth rate by spraying it with compost tea. Foliar spray makes plants green up faster and makes them grow faster. We also had situations requiring disease control. A farmer that I've been working with had some blight problems with his tomatoes. He used compost tea on the 3,000 pounds of tomatoes in his greenhouse and the blight did not come back.

Many people had stopped growing tomatoes last year because of late blight. But in the green house situation, he saw the blight come on and he was able to defeat it by using the compost tea as a foliar spray. Another farmer noticed gray mold on his beans and he was about to lose his crop. So together, we made a batch of tea with composted cow manure and we were able to defeat the gray mold on his beans and save his crop.

You're not suggesting that your compost tea totally eliminate compost?

It can, but you always have the after harvest materials and it would be a waste not to compost them. One farmer has been able to reduce the amount of compost material that he normally has to purchase elsewhere. Now he brings his after-harvest compost and mixes it with manure and straw and makes just one pile for the year. His land just doesn't produce enough material for the compost needed by the land. So, he uses about 600 gallons of the compost tea per acre per year.

Could this process be used in large farming operations?

Yes it can. We have had discussions with the managers of a 28,000-acre farm. They are putting 3000 acres into organic foods and they are building a 700-gallon tea brewer using a nozzle that I developed. This was something they had to do because they don't use any solid materials. The farm is all irrigated with these huge circle spray systems. Everything that goes on the ground goes through the sprinkler systems. In this case, compost tea. This is a perfect addition to their style of farming. The rest of the farm is conventional agriculture but they are interested in using compost tea on it in order to increase water retention and organic matter in the soil.

Could third-world countries use SoilSoup?

Yes! They can and I would say that the semi-developed countries that are struggling with their agriculture are going to be the first countries that with which we would like to participate. I feel that by using our system, because it is simple and easy for them to use, they would substantially decrease their fertilizing costs and increase the quality and yield of their crops.

How do you personally feel about SoilSoup?

I feel very good. It's the first time in my life that I've actually been involved in something ecologically sound. It feels good. This is work but it's something I love doing. It's something that is going to make a difference for the survival of our planet.

What do you see in the future for SoilSoup?

After talking to large and small organic and inorganic growers, master gardeners, nurseries and the great people at Seattle Tilth, that there's a need for the SoilSoup Compost Tea System. We feel we can make organic farming easier and more economical while having a positive impact on Mother Earth at the same time. It's going to take a lot of work to let everybody know that we are here, but we will. We will work on healing the planet one garden at a time. We may not get to all of them as soon as we would like, but we will make an impact.

The preceding article is a reprint. See <http://www.mennenursery.com/soilsoup.htm> for original source.