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The contribution of the European Society for Soil Conservation (ESSC) to scientific knowledge, education and sustainability

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Soil is an integral component of the global environmental system that supports the quality and diversity of terrestrial life on Earth. Therefore, it is vital to consider the processes and impacts of soil degradation on society, especially on the provision of environmental goods and services, including food security and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Scientific societies devoted to Soil Science play significant roles in promoting soil security by advancing scientific knowledge, education and environmental sustainability.

The European Society for Soil Conservation (ESSC) was founded in Ghent (Belgium) on 4 November 1988 by a group of 23 researchers from several European countries. It is an interdisciplinary, non-political association with over 500 members in 56 countries. The ESSC produces and distributes a hardcopy Newsletter twice a year and maintains both a website and Facebook page:
http://www.soilconservation.eu/
https://www.facebook.com/European-Society-for-Soil-Conservation-ESSC-100528363448094/

The ESSC aims to:
• Support research on soil degradation, soil protection and soil and water conservation.
• Provide a network for the exchange of knowledge about soil degradation processes and soil conservation research and practises.
• Produce publications on major issues relating to soil degradation and soil and water conservation.
• Advise regulators and policy-makers on soil issues, especially soil degradation, protection and conservation.

The ESSC held its First International Congress in Silsoe (UK) in 1992. Further International Congresses were held in Munich (1996), Valencia (2000), Budapest (2004), Palermo (2007), Thessaloniki (2011) and Moscow (2015). The Eighth International Congress will be held in Lleida (Spain) in June 2017: http://www.consowalleida2017.com/

Interspersed between these international congresses, the ESSC organizes annual international conferences on specific topics. These include Imola, Italy (Biogeochemical Processes at Air-Soil-Water Interfaces and Environmental Protection) in 2015 and Cluj-Napoca, Romania (Soil: Our Common Future) in 2016. Since its inception, the Society has made significant advances, including developing a strong and growing global network of soil scholars.

The ESSC honours major individual contributions to soil conservation through two awards made every four years at its Congresses, namely:

• The ‘Gerold Richter Award,’ awarded to a person who has, over their career, made significant and internationally recognized contributions to the investigation and/or promotion of soil conservation in Europe.

• The ‘Young Person’s Award’ is presented to a member of the Society, aged 40 years or less, who over the previous four years has made important contributions to soil conservation in Europe through research, practise, policy-making or another relevant activity.

The ESSC provides grants to young members to attend its conferences and promotes the organization of scientific meetings, soil conservation research, and co-operation between numerous institutions and individuals

on soil conservation initiatives. The societal challenges that can be addressed through better soil protection, as well as developing new knowledge and scientific approaches to soil protection and sustainable management, mean the ESSC embraces the on-going development, application, review and criticism of highly innovative scientific methods for soil conservation. It is in this context that the ESSC analyses and publicizes the roles and functions of soil in natural and human-modified systems and the functional optimization of soils to ensure sustainable environmental protection.