Soils are the basis of most agricultural systems and play a critical role in sustaining food production and healthy ecosystems. The capability of soil to continue to support sustainable agricultural supply chains will depend largely on the strategies employed by land managers. However, AB InBev recognizes there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to improving soil health across the wide range of soil conditions, technical capacities, and external pressures that define the realities of farmers around the globe. AB InBev – in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy and the Sustainable Food Lab – has developed this soil health framework to provide a unifying structure that is practical to implement, maximizes AB InBev’s ability to support our 20,000+ direct farmers, and provides flexibility to adapt to the different challenges facing our farmers around the globe. At AB InBev, we source our ingredients from farmers ranging from smallholders growing sorghum in Uganda to large-scale barley farmers in Siberia. We believe all of our farmers have the potential to improve their farm system and deliver valuable benefits to nature and society by unlocking the potential of the soil.

There is a wealth of evidence supporting the links between farm management practices and the health and functional capacity of soils. However, the exact nature and magnitude of the agronomic, economic, and environmental benefits afforded by a given set of practices will be affected by the context in which they are implemented. Therefore, the purpose of this framework is not to provide a prescriptive protocol to AB InBev farmers, but rather a common set of principles that allow for the tailoring of actions to the conditions in each of AB InBev’s sourcing regions. To facilitate the implementation of these principles and demonstrate how the framework can enable AB InBev farmers to build upon their existing successes in improving soil health, a set of suggested practices is included within each principle. These suites of practices are intended to be broadly applicable to a wide range of geographies, farm conditions, and skill levels – providing a range of options and entry points for farmers to engage with the AB InBev framework.
Soil Fertility Management
Careful, strategic management of soil nutrients can optimize yields of high-quality crops, while minimizing nutrient pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Potential practices contributing to this principle include:

- Implement regular, transparent soil testing that follows established protocols and is linked to actionable advice.
- Base nutrient management decisions on plant nutrient requirements and use, monitoring the efficacy of management with plant tissue testing.
- Adopt nutrient management planning following the 4Rs of nutrient stewardship (Right Source, Right Rate, Right Time, Right Place).
- Include organic residues (e.g., crop mulch), manure, or other inputs where possible to maximize potential organic matter build up in the soil.

Minimize Tillage
Minimizing the extent and frequency of soil disturbance improves soil structure, reducing compaction and erosion and improving water cycling and availability. Potential practices contributing to this principle include:

- Reduce the depth, frequency, and extent of mechanical cultivation as much as possible, to restore soil structure. The use of integrated management techniques, such as Integrated Weed Management (IWM), can balance tradeoffs or mitigate challenges that arise when transitioning to a minimum tillage regime.
- Practice contour and controlled traffic farming where appropriate to reduce erosion and minimize the extent of compaction.

Crop Rotation
Complex, well-designed crop rotations can break pest and disease cycles, increase agrobiodiversity, and reduce erosion and direct soil greenhouse gas emissions. Potential practices contributing to this principle include:

- Include 3 or more plant families with diverse characteristics, including nitrogen-fixing legume species, into rotation.
- Implement strategic planning to avoid planting similar crops in close succession and maximize the benefits of rotations.
- Introduce agrobiodiversity with relay- or inter-cropping.

Continuous Cover
Maintaining living plants, mulch, or plant stubble on the soil surface year-round helps keep soil in place, while restoring soil quality over time. Potential practices contributing to this principle include:

- Eliminate bare (clean) fallow that contributes to soil erosion by maintaining residue on the soil surface at all times.
- Adopt systems that result in continuous living cover (e.g., cover cropping, relay cropping, livestock/pasture integration, agroforestry) to improve soil quality and support healthy soil communities.

Regenerative Landscapes
A holistic approach to managing landscapes and integration of additional habitat into farmland can deliver multiple benefits to both farmers and nearby communities. Potential practices contributing to this principle include:

- Avoid and revegetate steep slopes whenever possible and stabilize slopes that must be cultivated with terraces, vegetative strips, or contour bunds.
- Install or maintain natural infrastructure to protect water bodies, including creating grassed waterways, riparian buffers, and restored wetlands that filter sediment and chemicals from field runoff.
- Incorporate trees into agricultural landscapes through agroforestry and windbreaks to provide habitat and protect soils.
There are many ways that AB InBev’s programs can support the adoption of the principles and practices for improving soil health included in this framework. AB InBev will continue to support and encourage our direct farmers to be leaders in sustainable agriculture by:

- Providing expert technical support through our agronomists that aligns with the principles for improving soil health and the best available science.
- Demonstrating the business case for investing in soil health through our farmer programs and model farms.
- Incorporating regionally relevant soil health practices into our crop protocols that are shared with our farmers.
- Developing strategic partnerships to create positive enabling conditions for the successful adoption of the soil health principles.

As farmers incorporate more advanced or additional soil health practices into their operations, they can expect to see soil health improvements. Our ranking system for reporting progress is customized to each region and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. Global reporting will be derived from the average performance of AB InBev farmers by zone, based on SmartBarley and farmer survey data.

*Practice rankings may be regionalized or context-specific.