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Soil quality — Determination of the water-retention characteristic — Laboratory methods

Qualité du sol — Détermination de la caractéristique de la rétention en eau — Méthodes de laboratoire

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 190, *Soil quality,* Subcommittee SC 3, *Chemical methods and soil characteristics*.

This second edition cancels and replaces the first edition (ISO 11274:1998), which has been technically revised. It also incorporates the Technical Corrigendum ISO 11274:1998/Cor. 1:2009.

Introduction

Soil water content and matric pressure are related to each other and determine the water-retention characteristics of a soil. Soil water which is in equilibrium with free water is at zero matric pressure (or suction) and the soil is saturated. As the soil dries, matric pressure decreases (i.e. becomes more negative), and the largest pores empty of water. Progressive decreases in matric pressure will continue to empty finer pores until eventually water is held in only the finest pores. Not only is water removed from soil pores, but the films of water held around soil particles are reduced in thickness. Therefore a decreasing matric pressure is associated with a decreasing soil water content[9][10]. Laboratory or field measurements of these two parameters can be made and the relationship plotted as a curve, called the soil water-retention characteristic. The relationship extends from saturated soil (approximately 0 kPa) to oven-dry soil (about -10^6 kPa).

The soil water-retention characteristic is different for each soil type. The shape and position of the curve relative to the axes depend on soil properties such as texture, density and hysteresis associated with the wetting and drying history. Individual points on the water-retention characteristic may be determined for specific purposes.

The results obtained using these methods can be used, for example:

— to provide an assessment of the equivalent pore size distribution (e.g. identification of macro- and micropores);

— to determine indices of plant-available water in the soil and to classify soil accordingly (e.g. for irrigation purposes);

— to determine the drainable pore space (e.g. for drainage design, pollution risk assessments);

— to monitor changes in the structure of a soil (caused by e.g. tillage, compaction or addition of organic matter or synthetic soil conditioners);

— to ascertain the relationship between the negative matric pressure and other soil physical properties (e.g. hydraulic conductivity, thermal conductivity);

— to determine water content at specific negative matric pressures (e.g. for microbiological degradation studies);

— to estimate other soil physical properties (e.g. hydraulic conductivity).