



Cover Crops





What is a cover crop?

- Any crop that is planted to provide soil cover
- Some types of cover crops are classified as
 - catch crops
 - green manures and
 - forage cover crops





Catch crops

- Planted after a harvested crop
- Used primarily to reduce nutrient leaching
- Examples:

Rye, wheat, and barley planted after silage has been cut





Green manures

- Any cover crop that is incorporated to add nutrients and organic matter to the soil
- Legumes that are incorporated also add nitrogen to the farming system (40-200#/A)
- Examples:

Oats and rye

Legumes- clover and hairy vetch





Forage cover crops

- Cover crops that are planted to cover bare soil that can also be used to meet animal feeding needs through pasturing or haying

- Examples:

Rye planted in the fall and cut for ryelage in the spring

Fall seeded pastures or alfalfa crops





Benefits of cover crops

- Ground cover-
- Decreases soil loss due to wind erosion
- Decreases soil loss due to water flow
- Decreases nutrient leaching to groundwater
- Keeps soil moisture in soils better than bare soil
- Warms soil more quickly than bare soils
- Can provide weed suppression





Benefits of cover crops

- Roots-
- Improve soil structure and tilth
- Improve water holding capacity
- Help prevent soil compaction in annually tilled fields
- Increase ease of tillage





Cover crops can also

- Scavenge or “recycle” nutrients
- Provide additional nutrients when incorporated
- Supply additional nitrogen from legumes
- Increase organic matter in the soil
- Decrease fertilizer expenses
- Decrease pesticide expenses
- Decrease diseases





Captain Obvious's reasons to consider planting cover crops

- There is not an unlimited supply of soil in your fields (when it's gone, it's gone)
- It is easier to farm topsoil than it is to farm bedrock
- More sediment in streams means more flooding, which means more soil erosion
- It is much easier to farm soil while its on your farm than when its in the Chesapeake Bay





Soil Math

It takes 1,000 years to make on inch of soil.

If you lose one ton of topsoil a year, you lose the thickness of a dime off the surface of your field annually.

Based on the thickness of a dime (1mm), how long would take to lose one inch of topsoil if you lost five tons of topsoil a year?





Soil Math

■ FIVE!?!?





SCCD Cover Crop Special Project

- This special project pays participants \$25.00 an acre to plant winter cover crops on their cropland.
- Participants must plant their cover crop prior to September 15th.
- Cover crop must be maintained until April 15th of the following year.
- SCCD will make payments to participants after April 15th.





SCCD Cover Crop Special Project

- The goal of the project is to reduce the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment that enter local waterways during the winter months from bare cropland.
 - Each acre of cover crop saves 8.28# N, 0.12# P, and 187# of sediment from entering local waterways.
 - Our goal is to have 300 acres of cover crop planted. This would save 2,484 # N, 36# P, and 28T sediment from entering local waterways.
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