

## **Taking Cover Crops to the next level**

After a few cover crop successes, most farmers tend to build upon the foundation of that success and tweak their cropping program in order to continue to maximize the opportunity of improving their soils health. We've been following multi thousand-acre Meadow Springs Farm, located in Chester County, Southeastern Pennsylvania for almost 2 years now on their quest to take cover crops to the next level on the fields they manage. Jamie Hicks and his brother Peter produce corn, soybeans, wheat, rye harvested as straw, and hay. They are intentionally thinking about the future and how cover crops can help achieve their goals in regard to increased soil health and responsible stewardship of the soil they manage.

### **What they learned in 2017**

This past year, in cooperation with the Stroud Water Research Center, a cover crop mix of radishes and crimson clover was broadcast on soybeans at leaf-yellowing. The cover crop seeds filtered down under the canopy and within a week or 2 the soybean leaves dropped providing good conditions for germination. By harvest time, Jamie said, "the cover crop was like a green carpet" and posed no problems for the combine. It should be noted that there is some risk with this strategy in that in a wet fall the cover crop could grow high enough to allow too much "green" go through the combine. You need to make it a priority to harvest these fields the first day they are fit!

### **What is planned for 2018**

Some new ideas are being implemented this year. In an effort to get more acres planted to cover crops they are looking to buy a 30 ft drill. This will allow them to essentially keep up with the 12 row combines as they harvest.

### **Organic No-till?**

Meadow Springs Farm is committed to no-till and have been so for years. That being said, they have a landowner who would prefer they farm his fields organically. The price of organic corn or soybeans will cause any farmer to take note and possibly consider that opportunity. Although Jamie is not certain this will work, he feels it's worth the effort to at least try! Stay tuned as we'll monitor the progress in future articles!