



Utilizing Cover Crops

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Quick Questions

1. Have you used cover crops before?
2. What cover crop species have you used?
3. What management practices did you use?
4. Was your cover crop use a success?
5. How many acres of cover crops are within 10 miles of your home?

What is a Cover Crop?

- A non-cash crop grown between two cash crops (Practical Farmers of Iowa)
- Close-growing crop that temporarily protects soil when crop residues aren't present – established for seasonal cover and conservation (NRCS)
- A crop planted to prevent soil erosion and to provide humus (Websters Dictionary)

Why Use Cover Crops?

- Addition of organic matter
- Provide Nitrogen
- Improve soil structure
- Reduce soil erosion
- Reduce soil compaction
- Manage nutrients
- Provide weed control
- Reduce soil salinity
- Provide livestock forage/grazing
- Increase crop and soil diversity
- Water management

Before Utilizing Cover Crops

- Identify a purpose
- Research and choose a specie(s) or mix(es) of species
- Do your own research on a small scale first
- Keep careful records
- Take best species/mixes and increase “plot” size
- Be creative and willing to change
- Live in reality

NCR-SARE Project

- Rural Advantage partnered with Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI)
- Fall 2009 thru Fall 2012
- Main Objectives:
 - Increase producer knowledge of cover crops
 - Increase number of cover crop acres
- Workshops, field days, listening sessions, surveys, articles, on-farm demonstration/research
- Cost-share Funds for on-farm demonstration and research throughout Minnesota



Cost-Share Funds (NCR-SARE)

- Funds for 20 cooperators [farmer-led demos]
- Cost-share up to \$20 per acre for up to 20 acres
- Record keeping, open communication, willingness to host field day or be on grower panel, survey questions, attendance to events
- Must include demonstration/research aspect on cover crop acres
- Geographic disbursement and demonstration aspect most important



Cover Crop Decision Tool

- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education [SARE]
 - “Managing Cover Crops Profitably, 3rd Edition”
 - Matrix of general best management practices for cover crop utilization around the U.S.
- Midwest Cover Crop Council [MCCC]
 - Use SARE matrix, convert to web program, make specific to each state in MCCC [www.mccc.msu.edu]
- Minnesota in 2011
- Rural Advantage’s NCR-SARE cover crop project will help compile information for Minnesota Cover Crop Decision Tool

Contact Information

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