

Protect Your Family Farm



Take the Cover Crop Pledge



Women landowners say they want their family farms to remain healthy and productive for future generations. But many feel they don't have all the information they need to protect their land. This booklet introduces cover crops, one of the simplest techniques to try with the most visible benefits. If you live on land that has been home to multiple generations and consider leaving healthy land as part of your legacy, take the cover crop pledge.



Cover Crop Q&A

What are cover crops?

A plant that covers the soil in the winter to hold on to your topsoil and protect from heavy spring rains.

What is the cover crop pledge?

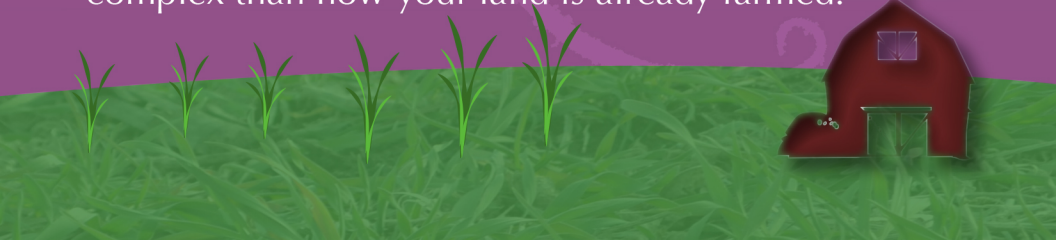
A promise to talk to your family or tenant about whether cover crops can help protect your family farm.

Who uses cover crops?

Look at your neighbors. Chances are several of them are using cover crops, and the percentage is growing each year.

How difficult is it to try?

Cover crops are simple to test. The process is compatible with existing or easily available equipment and is no more complex than how your land is already farmed.



Cover Crop

Are cover crops for me?

Check each box that applies to your farmland, and add up your checkmarks.

- ☐ Is your land sloped?
- ☐ Do you till your land?
- ☐ Is your soil more like cocoa powder than coarse bread crumbs?

Count your checkmarks.

0-1 = Moderate benefits to your land

2 = Strong benefits to your land

3 = Significant benefits to your land

Benefits

Healthy soil looks like coarse breadcrumbs. Normal farming practices take plant material out of the soil and make it look like cocoa powder.

Powdery soil is prone to erosion. Cover crops roots glue the soil back together and stop erosion. Shade protects from extreme temperatures and inhibits weeds. Added plant material holds more water. Cover crops keep nutrients up in the crop plant root zone.



Benefits

Timing

A cover crop is seeded into your cash crop either before or just after harvest. The cover crop grows and protects your land through the winter. In the spring, the cover crops protect the soil from heavy spring rainfalls and reduce soil erosion.

Yield

Properly managed, cover crops are either neutral to or increase yields. First time users should try cover crops when going from corn to soybeans, as there is little risk to soybean yield.



Lorraine Madsen wants to keep her farm in the family for kids and grand-kids to come back to. She is interested in the Cover Crop Pledge primarily for protecting the quality of her soil. "This is the one commodity I have, which is why I have to maintain it the best way that I know how." She is committed to learning more about cover crops and urges other women landowners to do the same. "You're not alone. There's others of us out there."



Planting C

Planting

Cover crops need to be planted with enough time to grow before winter begins. Depending on your situation, you may need to seed before or just after harvest.

Seeding equipment you might not own can be rented at your local coop or contact Practical Farmers of Iowa to find a pilot nearby your farm that can broadcast seed from the air.

Planting Options

1. Grain drill: A drill seeder that creates a shallow furrow and drops in the seeds. \$8-\$25 per acre.
2. Broadcast seeder: A seeder that uses a fan to spray out the seed onto the land. \$9-\$15 per acre
3. Fly it in: An airplane with an attached hopper spreads the dry seed over the existing cash crop. \$11-12 per acre.

- After harvest

- Before harvest



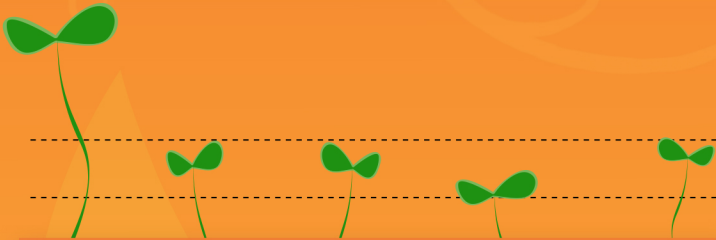
Cover Crops

Choices

While the most common types of cover crops are winter rye and spring oats, new research suggests using

a “cocktail” of 5 to 12 different types to ensure success under almost any conditions.

Maximum
Amount of
Erosion
Control
Benefits



Common Cover Crops

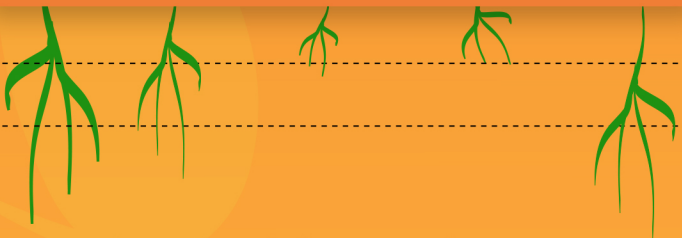
Rye

Oats

Clover

Hairy
Vetch

Tillage
Radish



“The idea of it holding the extra nitrogen in the soil and releasing it at the right time, I think that helps.”

-Rick



Winter's

Winter Hardy

Some cover crops die over the winter and others need to be killed with herbicide in the spring.

Winter Hardy

- Grows throughout winter
- Needs to be sprayed in spring
- Twice the benefits

*Winter rye, clover,
hairy vetch*

Winter Kill

- Dies during winter
- No spraying necessary
- Normal benefits

Radish, oats

Spraying

Winter hardy cover crops need to be killed in the spring, which is usually done with a sprayer and common herbicide.

It is important to kill the cover crop 10-14 days ahead of your normal planting to ensure best results of your cash crop.



**“If you’ve got a good tenant
he’s willing to listen.”**

-Rick



Thaw

Success

Cover crops are one of the simplest protective practices with the biggest payoff. But as with any new practice, it may take time to figure out how to fit it into your normal management routine.

For instance, using cover crops for grazing may have crop insurance implications. Farmers are smart enough to figure out how to make cover crops work, but they may need a couple tries. Don't get discouraged and don't give up. Many people are willing to help.



Rick Lee is happy his landlady talked to him about trying cover crops because of the benefits he is seeing after only one year. He admits he was hesitant at first, but the two pledged to try cover crops. The landlady helped pay for half of the extra expenses and kept half of any additional profit. Rick says landowners should not be nervous about talking to their tenants about the Cover Crop Pledge.



How to Get Started

How to start the conversation

- “I want our land to be as healthy as it was when I was growing up.”
- “I’ve been reading about cover crops.”
- “How much of an erosion problem do we have?”

Try a test plot

Cover crops are easy to test on a small scale. Try them for a year or two on 20 acres and see what

you think. The Natural Resources Conservation Service even offers financial help to get started.

Get more information

WFAN

515-460-2477
info@wfan.org

Practical Farmers of Iowa

Cover Crop Hotline: 515-232-5661
Ask for Sarah Carlson
info@practicalfarmers.org

USDA North Central Region
Sustainable Agriculture
and Education Program
612-626-3113
ncrsare@umn.edu

Iowa Natural Resources
Conservation Service
515-284-4370
Marty.adkins@ia.usda.gov



Cover Crop Pledge

Detach and mail and we'll send you more information on cover crops and a free gift!

- ☐ I will talk to my family or tenant about the protective and financial benefits of cover crops.
- ☐ I will test the benefits of cover crops on a few acres of my land.
- ☐ I will protect all of my crop land by using cover crops.

Name

Return Address

City

State

Zip

Phone

Email



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