



WHITEWATER RIVER WATERSHED NEWSLETTER

“Growing Healthy Soil: These strategies will help maximize your success with cover crops” By Steve Groff

Struggling to get your cover crop program off the ground or to take it to the next level? There could be many reasons for the difficulty. Farmers who are successful with it plan at least a year ahead. Treating your cover crops like cash crops lays a great foundation for maximizing success. Remember, cover cropping isn't a simple annual crop thing. There are a lot of moving parts. After all, you're working with biology and Mother Nature. You need to be “all-in” and as committed to the concept as you are to cash cropping. Plan time into your schedule to scout fields where cover crops were planted. Have a “plan b” in place if your original goals aren't being met. Be ready for unexpected opportunity. For instance, cash crops may mature early and open up options to use a greater diversity of cover crop species. So consider these advanced planning strategies:

- **Widen your cover crop window.** Adding cover crops to your system isn't like finding the missing puzzle piece. It's rearranging the picture. Strategically using a shorter season cash crop, interseeding cover crops into knee-high corn or simply arranging to have someone planting them behind the harvester are within your management ability.
- **Adjust herbicide programs as needed.** If you've never terminated a cover crop before, you'll need to learn how to do so from your local experienced chemical retailer or a successful neighboring cover crop farmer. Most residual herbicides don't pose a risk to fall-planted cover crops. But it's an aspect to check into if you don't know. Some cover crops aid in weed control. Cereal rye, for instance, is notable for keeping glyphosate-resistant marestail at bay before soybeans. A fast-growing fall cover crop of radishes can also keep winter annuals like henbit and chickweed from growing. Some farmers are able to eliminate a burndown application in those winter-killed fields.
- **Adjust fertility plan as needed.** This may be one of the more complicated parts of cover cropping. It's a good reason to think even more than 12 months ahead to manage wisely. Grass cover crops, such as cereal rye, take up all available nitrogen and require an up-front application in corn. For soybeans, this is a non-issue. But, a legume cover crop, such as hairy vetch or crimson clover, before corn can supply a portion of corn's N needs. How much depends greatly on when you terminate the legume. Allowing a legume cover crop to go to first flower is considered its maximum N production. But sometimes that's getting late for your cash crop planting window. On the other hand, winter-killed radishes give up their nitrogen relatively early in the spring. That makes it possible to reduce or eliminate an early application — then apply the crop's needs at sidedress time.
- **Sign up for cost share.** Check with your Natural Resources Conservation Service for either Environmental Quality Incentives Program or Conservation Stewardship Program benefits. Some states or watershed organizations also have funding available to plant cover crops. But check months in advance. Sign-up deadlines might be sooner than you think, and popular programs often are gobbled up quickly.
- **Navigate crop insurance rules.** Definitely learn the rules — on cover crop termination — you may need to work around in the context of insuring cash crops. Some local crop insurance agents aren't clear how to interpret the guidelines. Know those boundaries long before you plant cover crops. Some states also are “thinking on” giving crop insurance discounts for planting cover crops. Iowa is doing more than thinking. It's offering farmers who plant cover crops a \$5 per acre crop insurance discount over the next three years.
- **Bonus appreciation.** Finally, have a conversation with your landlords about the value of cover crops and their clear benefit for the land. Having landowner support and potentially even helping out with some of the associated cover crop costs could be a win-win.

The Coach's Closer

Cover crop success is directly related to how much you prepare. Planning at least 12 months in advance goes a long way down the road to success.

Groff is a cover crop pioneer and innovator who farms on the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Check out his website, covercropcoaching.com.



Whitewater River Watershed Project

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12th Annual Conservation Tillage Breakfast & Workshop

Saturday, March 3rd, 2018

Zimmer Tractor - 405 E. 7th Street, Brookville, IN

Agenda and Speakers:

7:30-8:30 am - Free Breakfast courtesy of Zimmer Tractor

8:30-9:00 am - Franklin County FSA, SWCD, NRCS, Purdue Extension, Whitewater River Watershed and Salt-Pipe Creek Watershed Project - Program Updates

9:00-9:45 am - Dr. Jason Ackerson, Purdue University

“Soil Compaction: What?!? And What Now?!?”

9:45-10:30 am - Dr. John Obermeyer, Purdue University

“Critter Consideration in Cover and No-Till Cropping Systems”

10:30 – 11:30 am - Mark Carter, Purdue Extension Delaware County – ****“Dicamba Update”****

*** Note - Mandatory training for anyone wanting to apply Engenia (BASF), XtendiMax (Monsanto), or FeXapan (Dupont). Even if you do not carry a license and work under for someone that does, if you will be applying the product you must attend a Dicamba training prior to application this year.



For questions or to RSVP contact:
Purdue Extension: (765) 647-3511 or
Franklin SWCD: (765) 647-2651 Ext. 3

Applicator credits have been applied for:

Private Applicator Recertification Program (PARP) & Commercial Applicator credits (CCH) Category 1

*PARP is \$10 and should be paid the day of the event. Please bring PA card.