NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Cover Crops
Small Scale Solutions for your Farm

Do You Have Problems With:

- Crusting soils
- Crop moisture stress
- Soil Erosion
- Cloddy soils
- Fertilizer costs
- Weeds

Corn growth showing effects from eroded soil. Cover crops provide residue to build soil organic matter and improve soil quality.

Cover crops can help.

Cover crops include planting and growing grasses, legumes, or combinations of grasses and legumes as cover between production crops.

Benefits of Cover Crops:

- Reduce erosion from wind and water
- Increase soil organic matter content
- Improve soil tilth / workability
- Store nutrients in the root zone
- Promote biological nitrogen fixation
- Weed suppression
- Take up excess soil moisture while growing
- Save soil moisture when used as a mulch
- Provide supplemental forage
- Improve crop yields
- Higher yields due to moisture

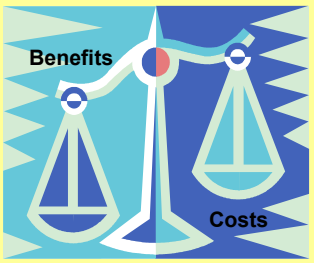
Rye cover crop

Cost to establish the cover crop:

- Seed cost can vary from about $2 per acre for oats to $15-$25 per acre for some of the legumes.
- Seedbed preparation can range from no cost, if no preparation is needed, to the cost of disking or similar tillage.
- Seeding can be as inexpensive as broadcast seeding or using a no till drill.

Cover crop benefits:

- $20-$40 dollar nitrogen credit for legume cover crops



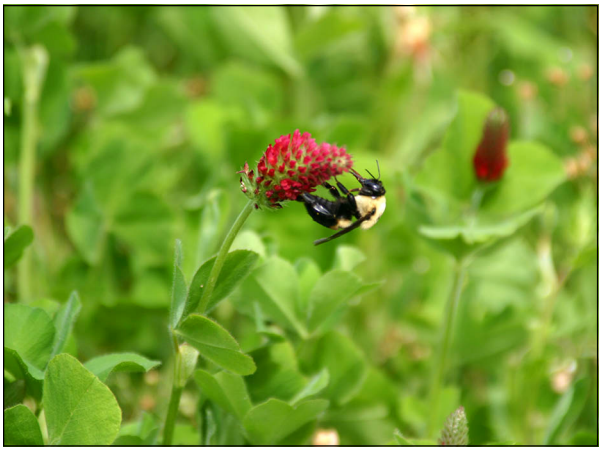
Cover crop benefits

Cover Crops

Cover crop establishment, types, uses, and management:

Cash crops can be seeded directly into rolled or killed cover crops or crop residue.

Buckwheat is a short season cover crop that suppresses weeds while improving soil quality.



Crimson clover is an excellent legume cover crop for the South providing cover for the soil, nitrogen for the next crop, and pollen for bees.

Black oats and crimson clover make a good cover crop mixture in some areas.

Fall seeded oats provide erosion control over the winter until crops are established in the spring.

Rye cover crop killed chemically and planted to strip-till cotton.

Cover Crops

Cover crop establishment, types, uses, and management (continued):

Recycled farm equipment can be used to roll down a rye cover crop. No disking or herbicides is needed.

The cash crop (soybeans) can be planted directly into the rolled rye cover crop.

A specially designed roller crimps the rye stem and lays it flat. The next crop is no-tilled into the cover.

Highly erosive crops like tobacco benefit from cover crops.

Specialty crops like pumpkins benefit from the protection cover crops provide from wind erosion.

Mixing cover crops, like rye, clover, and vetch, combine the weed control benefits of grasses with the nitrogen production of legumes.

Help is Available

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

SMALL SCALE SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR FARM

Technical Help Is Available

Your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office has experienced conservationists that can assist you with cover crops. They can also help you develop a Conservation Plan to solve other problems you have identified on your farm.

There is no charge for our assistance. Simply call your local office at the number listed below to set up an appointment and we will come to your farm.

You may also be eligible to receive financial assistance, through a state or federal program. Your NRCS office will explain any programs that are available so you can make the best decision for your operation. All NRCS programs and services are voluntary.

Helping People Help the Land

For More Information Contact the:

Natural Resources Conservation Service

<insert local information here>

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basic of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C., 20250-9410, or call (202) 720-5964 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

January 2009