

Agronomy "Crib" Notes

May 2013 – Wet Spring Weather & Cover Crops – Issue 4

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More rain coming....

The Indiana State Climate Office predicted in February that we could be in for a warm and wet spring and they were right with record setting rainfall in some Indiana locations in April and May. These wet conditions are certainly in contrast with the Spring of 2012.

Last year, we started out warm and dry which probably added to the detrimental drought conditions following it. Weather predictions in February were for this wet spring to be followed by mild to moderate drought conditions later this summer. Weather usually balances itself out; the timing is just not always what we would want or appreciate, but isn't that how we get our averages?

Though some areas of the state have been able to plant, there are other areas that are starting to wonder if they will ever finish. In years like 2009 and 2011, corn planting was delayed even later than this year and both turned out to be good production years. Predictions are for the weather pattern to shift to lower humidity, so good soil conditions should come. That will happen after it quits raining for several days. This time of year offers much longer days and more direct sun rays, which provide for good wicking and evaporation to dry the soil out enough to get the planter going again.

Fields utilizing cover crops may be able to tolerate planting under slightly higher moisture conditions. Those winter investments in planter setup are key to maximum flexibility. It is also imperative that producers with cover crops keep up on their scouting this year—in many cases, the green bridge between cover crop termination and crop planting has been less than ideal.

Understandably some producers have chosen the route of tillage to dry out the soil. Just remember, *the soil did not dry out, you dried it out!* Tillage on wet ground is also the perfect scenario for increasing the tillage pan (soil compaction) at the tillage pass depth, creating a one-to-two inch dense layer which limits roots seeking moisture later in the season. The loss of valuable surface material and soil organic matter may also make it more challenging later this year if it turns dry again without that protective cover on the soil.

Cover crops such as annual ryegrass and cereal rye may be harder to kill once it starts maturing. Increase spray volume and pressure to maximize coverage and penetrate the canopy to get lower growing plants.



Sedimentation caused by sheet erosion on tilled field

Cover crop growth needs to be terminated 7 days prior to the planting cut off date for insured crops to meet the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) policy. Additionally, producers are required to terminate a cover crop before planting the spring crop. Producers with a history of planting into a living cover crop may apply for a written agreement to allow insurance for this practice.

Cover crops may have added to the management in a difficult year, but they did not increase the wetness; the record rainfall did that! Fields with cover crops have retained much more topsoil and nutrients than those without. Once killed, cover crops will help protect the soil from potential drought conditions.



Nice cover crop of cereal rye and crimson clover following soybeans

Reminders!

Soil Health Workshops – Multiple dates. The Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative and the Indiana Conservation Partnership are sponsoring a series of soil health workshops across Indiana. Courses include: Introductory and Advanced-Level for employees and also farmer specific workshops. Contact IASWCD at info@iaswcd.org for registration and location details or go to <http://iaswcd.org/CCSI/ccsi-calendar.html> for dates and more information.

The **Purdue Pest and Crop Newsletter** is a great way to keep up with the latest information. Sign up at <http://extension.entm.purdue.edu/pestcrop/subscribeSecure.php>.

Past issues of Crib Notes are available at <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/agronomy/agronomy.html>

For **Insurance for Crops Following a Cover Crop** go to **USDA Risk Management Agency**, Springfield , IL, Release No. SRO-13-007 <http://www.rma.usda.gov/go/roil>

Need More Information?

For more information about cover crops, no-till, or other soil health practices, please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>. Visit www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory/field_offices.html to find the nearest office, and make an appointment with an NRCS District Conservationist.

Soil Health Resources: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health/>

Indiana Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative: <http://www.in.gov/isda/ccsi/>