



## Experts talk soil health—Newsletter article #1

*Written and produced by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service*

### **Discover the cover: Farmers realize benefits, challenges of soil-improving cover crops**

A growing number of farmers throughout the nation have “discovered the cover”—and for some very good reasons.

They're increasingly recognizing that by using cover crops and diverse rotations, it's possible to actually improve the health and function of their soil. According to David Lamm, a soil health expert with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Greensboro, N.C., farmers are also reaping the benefits healthy soils bring to their operations in the form of better nutrient cycling, improved water infiltration and more consistent yields over time.

“The principles of building healthy soils are the same everywhere—you have to stop tilling the soil and switch from a monoculture crop rotation to one with a diversity of crops that should include cover crops,” Lamm said. “But the path to soil health is different on each farm.”

Lamm said that keeping the soil covered and growing with living roots is a critical component in improving the health and function of the soil. “That means understanding how to manage cover crops in a soil health management system. And that can be one of the biggest challenges farmers face.”

According to Lamm, cover crop and cash crop selections and rotation sequences should be chosen to fit the farmer's resource concerns and priorities, and the resources available at that farm.

For more information on how to “Unlock the Secrets in Your Soil,” call or visit your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

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