



PROFILES IN soil health

Roy Petersen

McLean County, Illinois

Acres: 1,800

Crops: No-Till Corn and Soybeans

Covers: Annual Ryegrass, Cereal Ryegrass,
and Radish



Living Proof

Roy Petersen runs a 1,300 acre corn and bean operation in Central Illinois. His parents always had rotations and diverse crops, which included cover crops like oats, hay, pasture and corn. Maybe that's what prompted Roy to try a little experiment with cover crops. What he learned has made a big difference on his farm and his yield monitor.

Roy likes the fact that folks are getting back to basics like cover crops. He's one of them. About 4 years ago, Roy and his son Allan planted cover crops on his worst ground—20 acres near his walnut tree grove on some timber soils. The next spring, they planted soybeans, as usual.

That fall, Allan was watching the yield monitor while harvesting those 20 acres. He couldn't believe his eyes.

Soybean yields on that ground came in at about 70 bushels per acre.

That was all the proof they needed. In just one cover crop planting, they saw noticeable yield improvement—on their worst soil!

The following year, they seeded cover crops on 70 acres. They planted a mix this time that included annual rye, Austrian winter peas, and radishes, all after wheat. "We aerial seeded that, which cost about \$11-\$15 per acre.

But it's a good investment," says Roy. They were lucky because it rained that night, creating a perfect seedbed. They ended up with a perfect cover crop that had time to establish, send down deep roots, and do their magic.

Organic matter levels are up and that field is already planted to soybeans again. Water infiltration is high and both the Petersens are watching the field with interest.



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For fall 2013, they will seed cover crops on 200 acres. Are you seeing a pattern here?

According to Roy, when it comes to cover crops, it's all about timing. Soil temperatures are also important to consider. Roy and Allan use ProHarvest cover crop seeds and seed mixes. In the future, they might coordinate with a neighbor who has livestock. That would allow him to use radishes as a cover crop and offer it up as a valuable wintertime forage as well.

"As much good as the roots did to improve my soil, I figure the top growth could surely be put to good use as well," Roy said. He is eager to incorporate clover into his next cover crop mix.

"This is just another example of what benefits farmers can get from making a simple investment that improves the health of their soil," says District Conservationist Kent Bohnhoff from McLean County. "The Petersens saw a huge improvement in some not-so-great soils. Think what it could do on other soils. The sky's the limit!"

"I saw a difference quickly. I know my soils give every year and they get better every year too."

-Roy Petersen, landowner

The Petersens are pleased with their cover crop trials and are eager to see what new outcomes and benefits lie ahead in the future.

Roy keeps a close eye on all the information and stories in the press about cover crops and what other farmers are trying and learning. "I may not see all the improvements on our land, but I know we're making it better. We're improving the soil for the next generation. That's what's important to me," Roy explains.

To learn more about cover crops and other soil health improvement ideas, visit www.il.nrcs.usda.gov or call your local NRCS office today!

Roy Petersen



Allan Petersen saw high yield numbers on the monitor when harvesting a field with his poorest soils. He could hardly believe it. For this fall, more fields will be seeded to cover crops.

