

Agronomy "Crib" Notes



USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

May 2014 – Spring Management for Cover Crops
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Since we have a week of rain in the forecast, it is timely to revisit cover crop termination strategies. Cereal Rye in particular could grow rapidly with a week of moisture and warm enough temperatures.

Last year, we had many producers unable to get into fields to terminate cover crops until late May. To make matters worse, the crop insurance rules basically took away the option of planting first and then spraying the cover crop. Fortunately that rule has changed for this year. USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) made changes to provide more flexibility for cover crop management due to changing weather conditions and changes in cover crop practices for the 2014 crop year. To ensure RMA policies were up to date with evolving cover crop practices, the agency coordinated with NRCS and the Farm Service Agency through an interagency workgroup to develop a consistent, simple and flexible cover crop policy that can be applied across all USDA agencies

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/help/faq/covercrops2014.html> .

This year most fields going to corn have had a dry enough window to get cover crops sprayed, but in some cases the soil temperature was still pretty cool for rapid translocation. Fortunately, most fields that have been sprayed seem to be dying just fine.

On many fields going to soybeans, the cover crop may still not be terminated. Not to worry - that cover crop is probably competing with winter annual weeds and preventing small seeded broadleaf summer annual weeds from getting the sunlight they crave. Additionally, they are providing a jumpstart to the beneficial soil organisms that are critical for resilience to the summer heat and drought. Remember - when Cereal Rye gets over waist high it is usually better to plant first then terminate immediately after.



#1 - Check strips like this one can provide insight to the benefits of cover crops in just one season.



#2 - Differences in soil, 10 ft. apart, after just one season.

Cover crops may add to field management in the spring of the year, but cover crops can increase soil functions in as little as one season. In photo #1, the strip on the left has no cover crop, and the strip on the right has a cover crop. Photo #2 shows the differences in these two strips – the lack of cover crops (left) has dense and crusted soil following seed corn harvest and a winter of snow pack. The soil from the cover crop has much improved aggregation and will provide much improved infiltration and water holding capacity. The soils in photo #2 are the same soil type – the only difference is that one had cover crops for one year and the other did not have cover crops. We were surprised that cover crops could have this much difference after only one year on this soil. Disclaimer: results may not be typical for all soils in all years.

Reminders!

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>. Or go straight to the latest version here: <http://extension.entm.purdue.edu/pestcrop/2014/index.html>

Past issues of Crib Notes and Agronomy Guide Sheets are available at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/technical/ecoscience/agronomy/>

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/>.

Visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/> 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/>

A couple key videos of lessons learned from cover crop and soil pit digs in NW Indiana. One year impact of cover crop on soil tilth and aggregate stability after seed corn. <http://youtu.be/dhuONSwAAHs>

Velcro Soil - Get yours today! <http://youtu.be/1UrP9NbnLlw>