



Small Scale Solutions for your Farm

Cover Crops



Do You Have Problems With:

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

What are Cover Crops?

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

Benefits of Cover Crops

- Reduce erosion from wind and water
- Increase soil organic matter content
- Improve soil tilth and 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 content

Crop Cover Benefit

\$20 to \$40 nitrogen credit for legume cover crop.

Associated Costs

- Seed cost can vary from about \$2 per acre for oats to \$15 to \$25 per acre for some legumes.
- Seedbed preparation can range from no costs, when 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.

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



Rye cover crop.





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 spring crops are established.



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.

At right, specialty crops like pumpkins benefit from the protection cover crops provide from wind erosion. At far right, mixing cover crops, like rye, clover, and vetch, combine the weed control benefits of grasses with the nitrogen production of legumes.





Technical and Financial Assistance

Whether you measure your farm in terms of feet or acres, your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office has experienced conservationists that can help you develop a Conservation Plan to conserve, maintain, and restore the natural resources on your land and improve the long-term health of your operation.

There is no charge for our assistance. Simply contact your local office to set up an appointment. You may also be eligible to receive financial assistance. 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.

For More Information

Visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service or visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find your local NRCS office. You can also check with your local USDA Service Center, then make an appointment to determine next steps for your conservation goals.



NRCS partner assisting small scale farmer with developing a customized conservation plan. Photo by Erica Quinlan.

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