

TALKING WITH YOUR TENANT ABOUT:



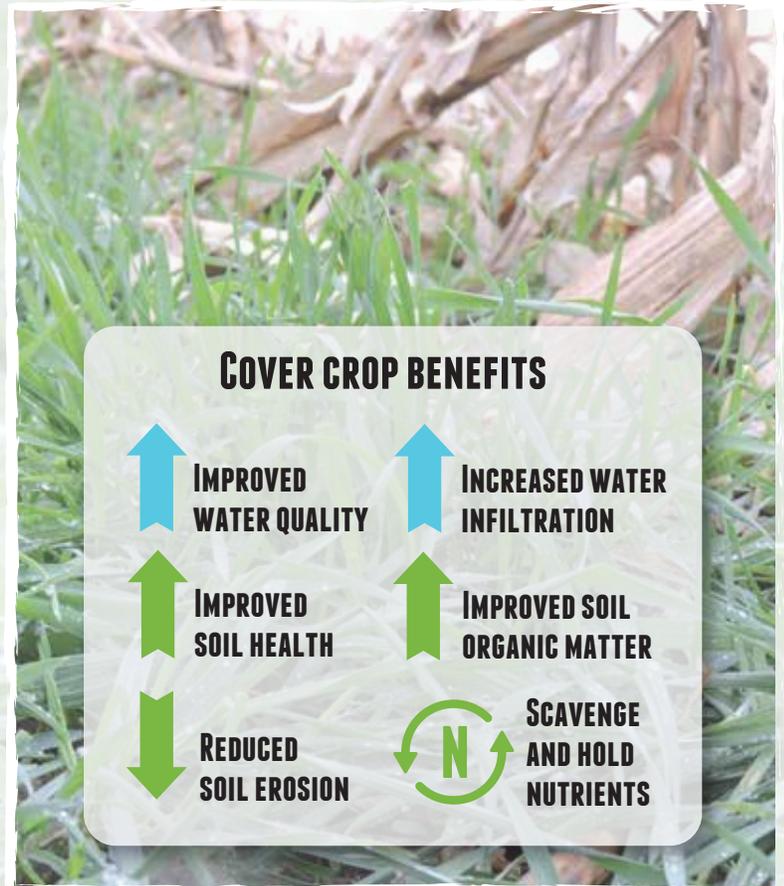
COVER CROPS

A cover crop is seeded with the purpose of protecting and improving soil health. Cover crops are normally planted without intent to directly harvest, and are usually grown outside of the regular cash crop growing season. Cover crops work to protect your land's productivity today and into the future.

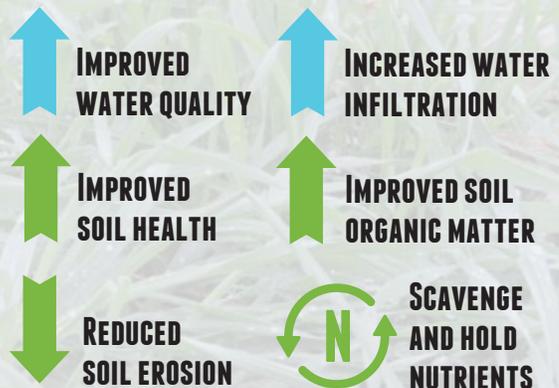
THE DOLLARS AND SENSE OF COVER CROPS

Cover crop expenses range from \$30-\$50 an acre depending on species and seeding method. Start with small grains, like winter cereal rye and oats, which are less expensive and are easier to establish.

In no-tillage systems, a cereal rye cover crop can reduce soil erosion by 30-80%. In other tillage systems, larger reductions can be achieved with cover crops if tillage is reduced or eliminated. The reduction in soil erosion can be conservatively valued at ~\$6.06/ton. By targeting cover crops to fields or areas prone to erosion, you can achieve greater return on your investment.



COVER CROP BENEFITS



SHARING THE EXPENSES

Lease terms are negotiable and can require the implementation of conservation practices. Below are examples of modifications of leases to include cover crops:



Lower the cash rent rate by the full or partial cost of implementing cover crops



Split expenses of seed, application, and/or termination if using a cost share agreement



Extending the length of the lease (e.g., 5 years) and show commitment to the partnership

To minimize the risk of adopting a new practice, there may be opportunities to receive cost-share from state and federal agencies. Contact your local NRCS office to see if your farm qualifies.



COVER CROP MANAGEMENT

Best management practices for cover crops include using proper planter settings for higher residue and assuring good spring cover crop termination.



EQUIPMENT - No additional equipment is required for establishing cover crops. However, access to a semi-truck or seed tender can lower seed costs by having it shipped in bulk. Check with your local Soil and Water Conservation District office for rental availability of a drill or leads to farmers in the area that could custom drill cover crops for you.



Drilling requires additional time and passes through the field during the harvest season, but results in more uniform coverage and establishment.



Aerially or overseeding into standing corn or soybeans shifts the labor demand to a less busy time of year, but is more expensive due to the need for higher seeding rates and application costs.



EQUIPMENT - Most planters can handle higher amounts of residue from cover crops with minimal modifications. It is important that planter settings are checked periodically and necessary adjustments are made to ensure good seed to soil contact for germination. When using an over-wintering cover crop, spring termination is required to meet crop insurance compliance rules. This can be done with herbicide, rolling/crimping, or tillage.



If using a species that winter kills, there are no additional time requirements in the spring.



The most common method of termination is herbicide, which is recommended 10-14 days before planting corn and at or near planting soybeans.

WILL COVER CROPS IMPACT THE CASH CROP YIELD?

In 2008, the Iowa Cover Crop Working Group established an on-farm cereal rye cover crop study.

After seven years in the study, the farmer partners have reported mostly no effect on corn and soybean yields.

Advice from farmer partners to minimize negative yield impacts:



Terminate the cover crop 10-14 days before planting.



Make adjustments to planter settings to handle more residue.

START SMALL

It is important to recognize that it takes time to learn new management techniques. Consider using the practice on a smaller portion of the land and increasing use each year, or suggest one change per year, so the tenant can learn new management skills to incorporate other practices successfully. Working together to gather information about the practice, and addressing any concerns early, will help smooth the transition to the new practice and minimize conflicts.

Your local NRCS staff and Iowa State University Extension field specialists are available to meet with you and your tenants to help answer questions, and to provide resources and technical assistance.



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