

How Do I Select A Cover Crop for My Farm?

That is a question I often hear from out in the country. Not always easy to give a quick answer. But here we go! Read all the popular press articles or things you find on the internet of interest. *Keep in mind not everything on the internet is true.* Talk with your neighbors or people in your community that have tried cover crops. Learn from their successes as well as the mistakes they may have made along the way.

When selecting a cover crop the first thing **you** need to do is set some goals. In other words what do you expect? Or what do you want to accomplish on a particular farm or field?

Consider these items:

- Reduced Soil Erosion
- Nitrogen Source
- Nitrogen Scavenger
- Improved Water Infiltration
- Weed Control
- Soil Builder
- High Quality Forage for Extended Grazing

This is not an all-inclusive listing but will get you started. Pick out 2-3 things you would like to achieve in a field. Look at your cropping system: cash crop, planting date, maturity, expected harvest date. Think of how a particular cover crop might affect the following crop. Winter cereal rye and wheat may have an allelopathic effect on a following corn crop if not terminated at least two weeks before corn planting. Legumes before corn not beans. Will the cover crop species be a potential weed problem?

What seeding method do you plan to use for the cover crop? Aerial application, drill, broadcast, fertilizer cart. Application method will determine the approximate

planting date (before or after harvest of your cash crop). Planting date may eliminate many cover crop options for successful fall growth.

Look closely at recommended planting ranges and avoid late planting. Biomass production is related to planting date. What is the cost of your seeding application? What herbicides did you use? Will they affect the germination of the cover crop chosen? Will the cover crop need to be terminated prior to planting the cash crop? What herbicide should be used to terminate the cover crop.....read the label. Timing and temperature may affect the success of the termination.

It looks like I ended with more questions than answers. Where is the best place to find information about selecting cover crops? And how can you make the selection process easy? Go to the Midwest cover crop council website: www.mccc.msu.edu/



Use the cover crop selection tool. You will select Illinois and your county.

Select which cash crop you will be planting, when it is planted and harvested. Select soil drainage type. Select 1-3 goals or attributes like from the list above. It will give you options for various cover crops that will work in the situation you have selected. Happy cover-cropping!

Dean Oswald, Cover Crop Specialist
Illinois Council on Best Management Practices