



Field Notes for The Week Of

1-10-22

Frozen Cover Crops

2022 is off to busy start and a cold start at that. The week of January 3rd through the 9th had a mixed bag of weather tricks. Winter weather returned towards the end of the week with some low temperatures reaching as low as -1°F with wind chills well below 0. As I was answering questions about everything from fertilizer prices, AI schools, beef bull production, and even bee keeping, I was able to take time to get out and look at a few wheat fields and even cover crop fields. One thing I noticed and took note of was how well cover crops that typically winter kill (die after the first freeze) are holding up in depths of winter. Winter kill species of cover crops typically include oats, radishes, turnups, and other warm season cover annual cover crops. Many of these species play a key role in breaking up compaction, scavenging for unused excess nutrients, and depositing organic matter. Other species of cover crops such as winter wheat, rye, and crimson clover are more winter tolerant and will survive winter. There are exceptions and unique situations where winter hardy species can winter kill, this usually happens when very cold temperatures last long periods without snow cover, ice forms on the plant in essence suffocating the plant, and flooding or long stretches of cold rain saturates the soil. The point I am trying to make is that Ohio winters are changing and plant growing seasons are getting longer. According to Arron Wilson (PH. D Research Scientist- Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center and OSU Extension specialist) Ohio experience one of the warmest Decembers on record in 2021 and many areas recorded the warmest Christmas day since the 1870's. December 2021 was also one of the wettest in history with upwards of 8+ inches being received across the state. Snow fall is also falling way behind as most Ohio's have seen less than 4 inches since winter has begun and for us in southern Ohio the first accumulating snow didn't take place until last Thursday and Friday! Soil temperatures are well above normal on temperature for January. Climate predictions are expecting this warmer wetter trend to continue through winter and a cooler wetter trend for early spring. Weather has always been a challenge for agriculture and always will be, adjusting to it and working with the weather and not against it is critical these days. Cover crops can be a great tool to work with the weather. I once thought that winter kill species of cover crops had little value when it came to protecting the land from erosion or other weather elements but as our winter become warmer these cover crops are putting bang for the buck spent than I ever realized!

