

Weekly Article

10-18-2021

Is Planting Cover Crops Worth Doing?

Hello, my Name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. Fall weather has finally made an introduction to the region. With cooler day time temperature and nighttime temperatures in the low 40's and upper 30's. There might be some widespread frost forecasted for this upcoming weekend. A good frost might be just what the doctor ordered for weed growth, insects, and slow the growth of lawn grass. The cooler weather will also help alleviate some of the fly issues on livestock, this will be a welcome relief for both man and beast. Fall is one of my favorite seasons even though it is the end of a season and winter is soon on its way. The growing season might be ending for our 2021 crops in the field and gardens but on the other hand it is the beginning of a new season with winter wheat and cover crops sprouting and turning the fields green. If you don't have cover crops planted in your fields or garden, don't worry there is still plenty of time to get them planted. Today I wanted to discuss cover crops in a different way than I have before by focusing on why it is so important to have something living in the soil all the time.

There are many benefits of incorporating cover crops in your management program some include erosion control, nutrient scavenging, compaction alleviation, weed control, soil building, and many more. But I have a basic easy to understand reason why planting cover crops is a good idea. Mother nature intended for the soil to be alive and sustaining life 365 days. As a farmer myself I often get caught up in the popular monocropping system of raise one crop harvest and keep the field as clean as possible to plant the next crop 4 -5 months later. This has been the basic concept of crop farming for many generations, the problem is that this goes against what mother nature truly wants. One practice that truly proves this is the process of succession (going back to its former state). If you were to stop growing crops on the land today, the field will not stay clean and bare very long. Winter annual weeds, grasses, Forbes and even sapling trees will become established overtime covering the land. Cover crops can mimic nature's goal of having a living soil. Some soil health benefits cover crops can provide are as follows.

1. Building soil carbon- as cover crops grow and die, they can sequester carbon or in other words store carbon into the soil rather than release Co₂ into the atmosphere.

2. Feed soil animals- soil animals can be referred to as microbiology of the soil some include mycorrhizal fungi that create a symbiotic relationship with plants, they receive a home with nutrients and water (plant roots) and in return they pay their rent with glomalin which is a protein that helps stabilize soil aggregates making them less susceptible to erosion, and better able to hold nutrients and water.
3. Creation of organic matter- When settlers came to the United States, they cleared and plowed land that had organic matter 3-4 times higher than the soil that we are farming today. When the soil is uncovered and exposed to the elements, organic matter can be lost. The higher the soil OM, the higher amounts of nutrients. As cover crops build up biomass they will eventually die, break down, release nutrients, and become part of the organic matter pool.

Some other details to go over.

- October 27th, 2021, Cybersecurity and you seminar 8:00 am-11:00am. Hear from professionals about current cyber security trends, how to protect yourself, and Free Resources. Register at www.ADAMSCOUNTYOHCHAMBER.COM/CHAMBER-EVENTS
- Milkweed pod collection taking place now through the month of October at the Adam County Soil and Water Conservation service, call (937) 544-2033 Ext.4
- November 20th – NAP Deadline for 2022, NAP provides financial assistance to non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of crop, or prevention of planting due to weather extremes. Call the local FSA office for details at (937)544-2033
- Annual OCA Replacement Female Sale- November 26, 2021 at 6:00pm at the Muskingum Livestock Auction Co.

From the field

- Soybean harvest is in full swing with yields ranging from 56-72 bu/ac and test weight around 56-57 lbs/ bu.
- Corn grain harvest is full swing- 170 bu/ac -200bu/ac yields have been reported slightly lower than normal test weight and poor standability
- Cover crops are still being planted.
- Winter wheat and cover crop emergence is looking good.
- Wrapper tobacco market opens October 19th stripping has begun.
- Higher demand for feeder cattle price hovering around 1.50/lb for 500lb calves.