Talking with your Landlord:

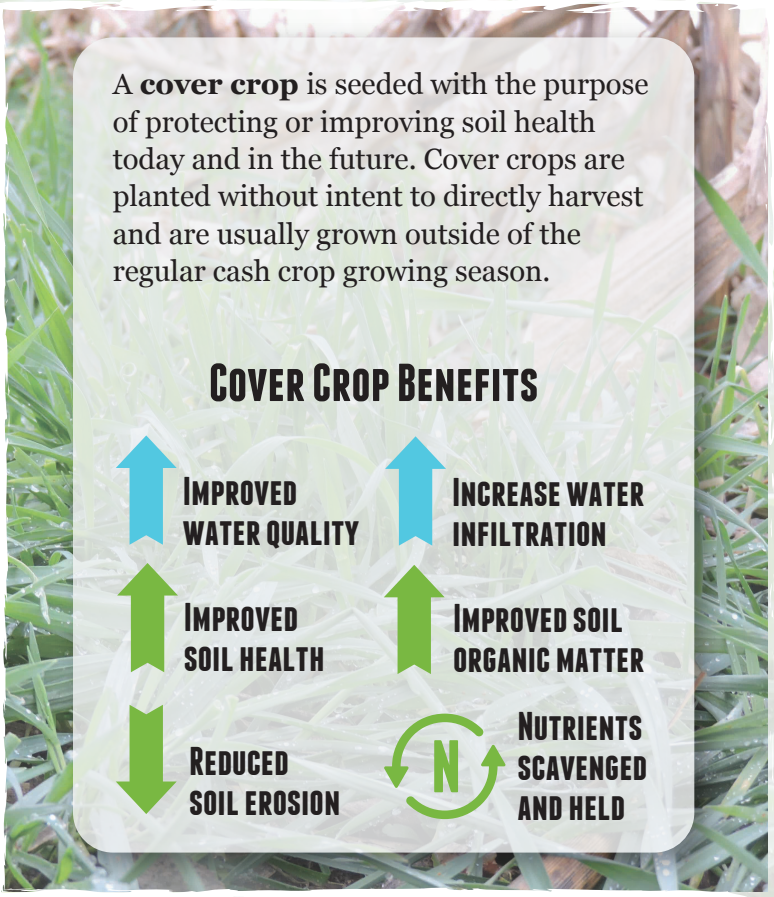
COVER CROPS

There are many landowners looking for young, innovative farmers who are promoting a sound conservation ethic as they look at the future care of their land. Gaining conservation, communication and financial skills will help Emerging Farmers stand out in the community and create a competitive advantage for building relationships with future landlords. This publication series lays the initial roadmap to help develop those skills and provide resources for continued growth.

The Dollars and Sense of Cover Crops

Cover crop expenses range from $30-$50 per 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-till systems, a cereal rye cover crop can reduce soil erosion by 30-80%. In other tillage systems, larger reductions can be achieved if tillage is reduced or eliminated. The reduction in soil erosion with cover crops can be conservatively valued at ~$6.06/ton. By targeting cover crops to fields or areas prone to erosion, you can achieve greater return to your investment.



Sharing the Expenses

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

RENT

Reduce 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

Extend 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.

EMERGING FARMERS

Cover Crop Management

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

Fall

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 seed shipped in bulk. Check with the local Soil and Water Conservation District office for rental availability of a drill or names of area farmers that could custom drill 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.

Spring

Equipment – Most planters can handle higher amounts of residue from cover crops with minimal modifications. It is important to check planter settings periodically and make adjustments to ensure good seed to soil contact. 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.

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

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

Will Cover Crops Impact the Yield?

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

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

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 each year to learn new management skills to incorporate practices successfully. Working with your landlord 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 and Outreach field specialists are available to meet with you and your landlords to help answer questions, provide resources and technical assistance.

For more cover crop resources visit www.iowalearningfarms.org/cover-crops

WWW.IOWALEARNINGFARMS.ORG

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