

EQIP helps out with cover crops

Commentary

By SARAH CARLSON

COVER crops are “green” crops that grows during the “brown” season following fall harvest and until spring planting. Farmers growing cover crops currently can receive an incentive payment through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

With an EQIP contract, growers in these counties can receive a conservation payment for having cover crops: Allamakee, Benton, Bremer, Buena Vista, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Clayton, Dallas, Dubuque, Fayette, Grundy, Hardin, Howard, Iowa, Johnson, Kossuth, Monroe, O’Brien, Osceola, Sioux, Story, Winnebago, Winneshiek, Woodbury, Worth and Wright.

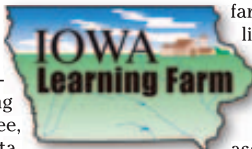
Cover crops have been made eligible because of the important environmental benefits they provide:

- 13% to 94% reduction in nitrogen loss
- 54% to 94% reduction in total phosphorus loss
- reduced soil erosion
- reduced weed pressure

Key Points

- Cost-share for establishment of cover crops is available in some counties.
- Planting a cover crop after soybean harvest saves soil, reduces nutrient loss.
- Cover crops also reduce weed pressure and improve soil structure.

- improved soil structure
- Cover crops provided flexibility during this year’s wet spring as some farmers were able to graze livestock when hay was in limited supply.



Calculate the costs

The table shows costs associated with cover crops. Some crops, like rye, survive through winter and need to be killed in the spring; others, like oats, die in winter.

The machinery-related costs in the table are based on \$4-per-gallon diesel adjusted from Iowa State University 2008 Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey. Typically counties with cover crops on their EQIP list are reimbursing at \$31.50 per acre from one to three years.

“September is a good time for farmers to encourage local county offices to make cover crops an eligible practice,” says Larry Beeler, NRCS assistant state conservationist for programs. “Each

October, the NRCS begins a new fiscal year, meaning new available money.”

If EQIP is not available, another source of incentive payment could be the Conservation Stewardship Program, formerly called the Conservation Security Program. Beeler says, “As a result of the farm bill, CSP has had significant changes, and NRCS is working on policies and procedures to carry out the new CSP. Contact your local NRCS office.”

The Midwest Cover Crops Council, a partnership formed in 2006, was created with the goal of nonprofit organizations, university researchers, farmers, agency

and private sector groups working together regionally to increase cover crop use 30% by 2021 in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region.

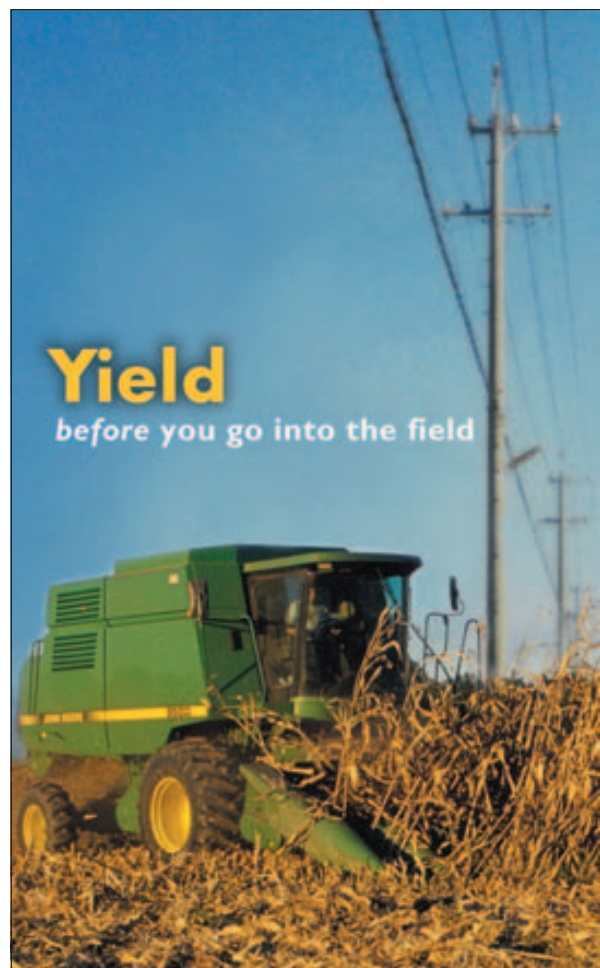
Current projects include development of a Web site and a decision-making tool. The Web site, to be launched later this year, will include a list of resources including Extension bulletins and peer-reviewed publications, contact information, links to each group’s Web site, photos, events, programming, and access to a decision-making tool.

Carlson is a program specialist with Practical Farmers of Iowa.

Costs to establish and manage cover crops

Cover crop	Seed cost	Planting	Planting cost
Rye (conventional)	\$11.75/bu.	Drilling (Rate: cereals 1 bu.; vetch 30 pounds)	\$13.02/acre
Rye (organic)	\$13.00/bu.	Aerial seeding (Rate: cereals 1.5 bu.; vetch 45 pounds)	\$13.00/acre
Hard winter wheat	\$16.75/bu.	Disking	\$15.64/acre
Soft winter wheat	\$18.50/bu.	Spring kill	
Triticale	\$14.75/bu.	Herbicide application	\$ 6.08/acre
Hairy vetch (conventional)	\$ 1.80/lb.	Glyphosate (widely used)	\$ 8.00/acre
Hairy vetch (organic)	\$ 1.85/lb.	Tandem disk	\$11.48/acre
		Field cultivate	\$11.36/acre

SOURCE: PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA



Electrical power lines and buried cable represent some of the greatest potential dangers on the farm. As harvest season approaches, be sure to steer clear of all overhead lines and look out by looking up. If equipment you are operating comes into contact with a power line, stay on the machine and wait for help to arrive. If you have a cellular phone, call 911.

To learn more about farm safety and electricity, call 888-427-5632 or go to midamericanenergy.com and click on the safety link.



888-427-5632