

CULTIVATOR

MAKING THE MOST OF PREVENTED PLANTING

By Mac Ehrhardt

“I’ve farmed for 50 years, and I’ve never not planted a crop...until this year.”

That’s a comment we heard, in one form or another, far too many times this year. As conditions swung from a moisture deficit to a major surplus, an estimated 15-20% of the acres in some areas of our territory remained unplanted. As of May 29, northwest Iowa had experienced their wettest spring in 141 years. According to the Farm Service Agency in Minnesota, more than 725,000 acres are in prevented planting status—most in the southeastern portion of the state.

To you, of course, this is old news. The challenge now is how to make the most productive use of those acres that couldn’t be planted to conventional crops. For many farmers, the answer has been cover crops, and we have been incredibly busy working with many of you to make seed selections that best fit your situation.

FIRST THINGS

There are three things you need to do before you make any firm decisions regarding cover crops. First, always check with your FSA office and your crop insurance agent to make sure that what you want to do fits within the rules.

Second, visit our website, www.alseed.com. We have a link right on our home page that will connect you with a very helpful collection of resources that will guide you in your decision-making process. Finally, think about what herbicides are on the ground and how that might limit your planting options.

WEIGHING YOUR OPTIONS

Once you’ve taken those steps, you still have some decisions to make. From a seedsman’s perspective, your cover crop choices will likely be made in order to accomplish one (or more) of three basic objectives.

1. “I am hoping to harvest my PP acres for forage.”

Currently, you cannot harvest prevented planting acres for

forage acres until Nov. 1. This may change moving forward, but don’t count on it. So, think carefully about what you plant, when you plant it, and how you might harvest it on Nov. 1 if it freezes on Oct. 15 and rains for two weeks. Make sure you can handle the crop you are planting if the weather does not cooperate.

As far as what you might want to plant as a forage cover crop, oats planted around Aug. 15 might be the cheapest, safest option. Winter wheat or winter rye can also be used, but will not get as tall as the oats and also will come up next spring. Finally, sorghum sudans and millets are going to produce the most tonnage, but also will be the most problematic if we get bad weather.

2. “I want the cheapest cover crop available.”

As I mentioned above, oats are inexpensive, and annual ryegrass is another very affordable option. Considerations include rate, how you will get good seed-soil contact, and how you are going to manage the weeds. Remember that oats and annual ryegrass are cool-season crops and don’t perform that well in hot, dry weather.

3. “I want to build my soil to grow more corn/beans next year.”

For soil building, use mixtures—they are better than monocultures. (See www.covercropsolutions.com for more on this.) Here are a few of our recommendations:

- Indy Mix (from CCS) (tillage radish, crimson or Berseem clover, annual ryegrass)
- Bristol Mix (from CCS) (tillage radish, annual ryegrass)
- Tillage radish plus your own oats

In all likelihood, cover crop acres weren’t what you had in mind for your prevented planting acres as spring rolled around. But with your long-term goals in mind, cover crops can deliver an economic benefit even this year and certainly in the years that follow. ■



THE “NEW” BENEFITS OF COVER CROPS

By Matt Leavitt, Albert Lea Seed Agronomist

Cover crops have long been known to be beneficial to soil health in a multitude of ways. What is “new” is that many corn and soybean farmers are rediscovering cover crops as a tool to increase their profits. They are increasingly being recognized for their short-term and long-term positive impact on cash crop yields.

A recent survey* of over 750 farmers from roughly 18 states in the Upper Midwest found that corn planted after cover crops in 2012 had a reported 9.6% yield increase compared to side-by-side fields with no cover crops. Soybean yields increased 11.6% over fields with no history of cover crops. These reported yield increases were even more dramatic in states hardest hit by the 2012 drought, with an 11% yield increase for corn and a 14.3% increase for soybeans.

In an ongoing five-year trial with cooperating farmers to determine how cover crops affect yield of corn and soybeans, Practical Farmers of Iowa reported that cover crops had no negative effect on corn yields at eight site-years. They also found that cover crops either positively affected or had no effect on soybean yields in 10 out of 10 site-years. Additionally, replicated research conducted by the University of Missouri, in collaboration with Cover Crop Solutions, found that tillage radish boosted corn and soybean yields the following year by 10% and 11%, respectively.

SOIL STAYS PUT

Protecting soil from erosion is one of the most obvious benefits that cover crops provide to a farming system. Cover crops can also prevent leaching of valuable applied fertilizer. A five-year study by Practical Farmers of Iowa showed that winter rye alone reduced N leaching by 28% and P leaching by 50%. Cover crops can also aid in building soil organic matter: a critical factor in soil productivity and soil moisture retention. With rainfall patterns becoming more erratic, planting cover crops is an excellent way to conserve soil moisture while protecting yields and profitability.

Proper management, correct timing of planting and termination, proper soil preparation, and correct planting depth are keys to successful integration of cover crops into your farming system. No matter the rotation, farming system, or field, we are confident that we can find a viable cover crop option that works for you. ■

*North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education organization (SARE)

	Seeding Rate (lbs/acre)			Seeding Date	Seeding Depth	Total N (lb/A/yr)	P & K Scavenger	Soil Builder	Weed Control	Grazing
	Drill	Broadcast/Aerial	In Mix							
Winter Rye	75-120	120-150	50-75	Aug.-Nov.	1"	-	VG	E	E	E
Oats	64-96	96-128	48-64	Aug.-Sept.	1 - 2"	-	F	G	E	E
Annual/Italian Ryegrass	30-35	35-40	4-15	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	-	G	VG	VG	E
Forage Rape	4-8	8-10	1-2	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	-	VG	G	VG	E
Tillage Radish	6-8	8-10	3-4	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	-	VG	VG	E	E
Nitrogen Producing Cover Crop Legumes										
Hairy Vetch	25-35	30-40	15-20	Aug.-Oct.	½ - 1"	70-200	G	VG	G	F
Winter Peas	40-70	Not Rec.	15-30	Aug.-Sept.	1 - 2"	70-150	F	G	G	VG
Crimson Clover	12-25	25-30	2-5	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	55-130	G	G	VG	VG
Cover Crop Mixes										
Fall Green Manure Mix 1 Tillage Radish + Field Peas + Oats	75-125	90-150	-	Aug.-Sept.	½ - 1"	50-75	G	VG	E	E
Fall Green Manure Mix 2 Tillage Radish + Crimson Clover + Annual Ryegrass	15-20	20-25	-	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	30-65	VG	E	E	VG
Fall Green Manure Mix 3 Winter Rye + Hairy Vetch + Peas + Crimson Clover + Annual Ryegrass	50-75	75-100	-	Aug.-Sept.	½ - 1"	50-75	G	VG	E	E
TillageMax Brisol Mix Tillage Radish + Rootmax Annual Ryegrass	12-15	15-17	-	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	-	VG	E	E	E
TillageMax Indy Mix Tillage Radish + Rootmax Annual Ryegrass + Crimson Clover (coated)	15-17	17-20	-	Aug.-Sept.	¼ - ½"	30-65	G	E	VG	VG
TillageMax Homestead Mix Tillage Radish + Tillage Sunn Hemp + Sorghum/Sudangrass (treated)	15-20	Not Rec.	-	June-Aug.	½ - 1"	30-50	G	E	E	NA
TillageMax Prevented Planting Mix Tillage Radish + Persian Clover (coated)	6-10	10-12	-	June-Aug.	¼ - ½"	20-40	NA	VG	G	NA

E = Excellent VG = Very Good G = Good F = Fair P = Poor

NEW WEAPON IN THE ROOTWORM WAR

We all know that corn rootworms are a serious corn pest, particularly in corn-on-corn acres. And researchers have also discovered that some rootworm populations are now even able to feed on corn with onboard rootworm protection. However, help is on the way in 2014 with the introduction of the Agrisure Duracade™ trait. Agrisure Duracade is a novel insect protection event from Syngenta® that delivers unmatched corn rootworm control, consistency, and yield potential.



The Agrisure Duracade trait will only be sold in stacked combinations with other rootworm-fighting traits to protect its efficacy and to prevent other resistant populations from developing. There will be two initial trait stack options.

The Agrisure Duracade 5122 trait stack combines the Agrisure Duracade trait with the Agrisure RW trait for dual modes of action against corn rootworm, the Agrisure CB/LL trait for control of corn borer, the Herculex® I trait for an additional mode of action against corn borer and broad lepidopteran control, and

the Agrisure GT trait for glyphosate tolerance. The Agrisure Duracade 5222 trait stack includes the same traits as the Agrisure Duracade 5122 trait stack with the addition of the Agrisure Viptera® trait.



We will have a limited supply of hybrids with the Duracade trait available for planting in spring of 2014. We encourage you to try them on acres with a known rootworm problem. ■

WHY ARE MY SOYBEANS SO SHORT?

By Jake Hansen, Staff Agronomist

“Why are my soybeans so short?” The short answer is to chalk it up to our strange spring. A better agronomic answer has to do with the basic nature of soybeans. Unlike corn, which matures based on accumulated heat units, soybeans mature based on day length. Many to most of our soybeans were planted in June this year, much closer to the summer solstice. That is a significant date for beans, roughly corresponding with their switch over from the vegetative to the reproductive state.

So, no matter how tall they are, when the day length dictates it, they begin to flower. The internodes no longer have a chance to elongate. Ultimately, this won't affect the number of pods, but it will definitely affect the placement of those pods. Come harvest, you'll be finding pods an inch or two from the ground, and that will pose some risks for your sickle bar.

Weed control is also likely to be an issue, as there will certainly be fields of soybeans that won't canopy. That could mean a third application pass in some fields to keep the weeds under control.

In years like this one, one recommendation we make is to plant higher populations when you plant late. Higher plant density forces the individual soybean plants to grow taller as they compete for sunlight.

OTHER CONCERNS TO WATCH

Many of you are also noticing yellowing in areas of your soybean fields. Iron deficiency chlorosis (IDC) is a significant problem this year, due to all the spring moisture. It will be spotty, showing up primarily in the poorly drained areas of the field. On the positive side, this does allow you to identify problem areas.

Going forward, there are some ways to address the issue. Consider higher seeding rates in those areas, soil test for soluble salts—which do have an impact on chlorosis, and follow your herbicide labels carefully. Some of our herbicides are soluble salts. Most importantly, improve drainage, either by deep tillage, tiling, or adding soil tilth by increasing organic matter, which naturally improves drainage.

Plants weakened by IDC are also more susceptible to soybean cyst nematodes (SCN). After all the early moisture, the tap has

been turned off and temperatures have climbed. That leads to soil crusting, which encourages SCN development.

There is some good news. I don't believe white mold will be a big issue this year. Like molds in general, white mold likes cool, dark, damp conditions. Shorter beans will let more sunlight in and won't lodge, discouraging white mold development. Also, our later planting dates should reduce the incidence of SDS (sudden death syndrome) this year. It tends to be a greater problem with early planted beans. ■

You may find the following links helpful:

www.aganytime.com/Soybeans/Pages/Article.aspx?name=Soybean-Sudden-Death-Syndrome&fields=article&article=841

www.aganytime.com/Soybeans/Pages/Article.aspx?name=Managing-White-Mold-in-Soybean&fields=article&article=837

www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2013/0605tylka.htm

www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2013/0604mueller.htm





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WHAT'S FINE FOR FALL SEEDING

With an exceptional number of unplanted acres this year, there is a higher-than-normal interest in fall seeding options. Fortunately, there are many viable choices available depending on your cropping system and production goals.

COVER CROPS (see page 2)

There are many cover crop options (see page 2) available for fall planting (after Aug. 15). When planting cover crops, a few key principles will help to maximize success.

In general, the greater the plant diversity, the better the chance of success. Cover crop mixes have a greater diversity of species, growth patterns, and resource utilization, and they will do better under a wider range of weather, soil, and moisture conditions. We strongly recommend mixes over individual species in most cases.

When seeding cover crops you want to ensure good seed-to-soil contact, proper seeding depth, and adequate soil preparation. Try to time fall cover crop seeding with a forecasted rain as much as possible.

Finally, remember that you may not be able to harvest your cover crops for dry forage prior to the Prevented Plant Nov. 1 deadline.

WINTER GRAINS

The benefits of winter small grains include the convenience of fall seeding, which get the crop up early in the spring and avoids the potential concern of trying to seed a small grain in poor spring planting conditions (this year being a prime example). Also, fall seeded small grains provide good ground cover and help prevent erosion, and they're good for the soil.

Here are a few winter grain options:

- Winter wheat is normally grown for grain, and west of the Mississippi we normally seed hard red winter wheat. Soft red winter wheat is seeded east of the Mississippi.
- Winter rye is normally seeded as a cover crop or forage. It is rarely grown for grain, as it is relatively low yielding and less desirable as a grain than other small grain options.
- Winter triticale is normally seeded in the fall to be taken in the spring as silage or hay. It is less winter-hardy than winter rye.

In southern Minnesota and northern Iowa, planting dates are normally Sept. 10 – Oct. 10 for winter wheat and winter triticale. Winter rye can be seeded at least a month later, as it is much more winter-hardy.

See our website, www.alseed.com, or give us a call for variety availability, planting rates, and other agronomic information.

ALFALFA

The best time to seed alfalfa in southern Minnesota, northern Iowa, and Wisconsin is from Aug. 10 until the end of the month. You need six weeks of growth prior to freeze-up in order to establish a root that will allow newly planted alfalfa to survive the winter. We do not recommend fall seeding alfalfa with a nurse crop—oats, wheat, or winter rye. You can, however, seed it with grasses—brome, timothy, or orchard grass—for a forage blend. Follow regular alfalfa seeding practices, and call us for more information. ■