



## Cover Crop

*A small grain or legume crop planted in the fall to recover unused plant nutrients from the root zone, control soil erosion and improve the soil.*

### Description

Cereal grains such as wheat, rye or barley, or legumes such as clover that grow in cool weather, are planted as cover crops in the fall following the summer harvest of corn, soybeans or other crops.

### Benefits

Cover crops of small grains are recommended in the fall and winter to tie up nutrients that are left over from the previous crop and to reduce leaching of nutrients to surface and groundwater supplies. Cover crops are used to protect the soil from wind and water erosion, improve soil health, increase water retention and reduce weeds and pests. Cover crops may reduce fertilizer requirements in the spring.

### Planning

- Can the cover crop be planted into standing crops?
- Will the seeding method allow you to meet fall planting deadlines for nutrient uptake?
- Are adequate soil conservation measures installed?

### Tech Notes

- Cover crops are recommended to improve nutrient management.

- Cover crops need 30 to 40 days of good growth before the first hard frost. Plant fall cover crops from early August until mid-October.
- Cover crops are often recommended when low residue producing crops such as soybeans or corn silage are grown.
- To optimize germination, use tillage methods that achieve soil to seed contact.
- Cover crops may be aerial seeded prior to harvesting summer crops or seeded using no till or conventional methods after harvest.
- Aerial seeding rates should be increased by 25 percent.
- Follow NRCS recommended seeding rates.

### Maintenance

- Cover crops may be green chopped or grazed, once well established.
- Kill cover crops in the spring. Mowing or herbicide application is acceptable. Deep tillage is not recommended because it will bury residue. Timely kill is important to reduce the risk of depleting moisture needed for spring grain crops.