

Cover Crop...grasses, legumes, forbs, or other herbaceous plants established for seasonal cover and conservation purposes.



Cover crop, photo courtesy USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Purposes

This practice is suitable for the following purposes:

- Reduce erosion from wind and water**
- Increase soil organic matter**
- Manage excess nutrients in the soil profile**
- Promote biological nitrogen fixation**
- Increase biodiversity**
- Weed suppression**
- Provide supplemental forage**
- Soil moisture management**

Benefits

Cover crops can improve soil tilth, control erosion and weeds, provide supplemental forage, and maintain or improve organic matter. They can reduce soil compaction and increase water infiltration. Cover crops have a filtering effect on movement of sediment, pathogens, and dissolved and sediment-attached pollutants.

Applications

This practice applies on all lands requiring vegetative cover for natural resource protection.

Design and Installation

In this practice, cover crops such as grasses, cereal grains, or legumes are planted as soon as possible after harvest on fields where the soil is not adequately protected from wind and water erosion during winter and spring. Cover crops can also be used on sandy soils to reduce nitrate leaching.

Cover crops are best suited to low residue crops grown on erodible land. Plant species, seedbed preparation, seeding rates, seeding dates, seeding depths, and planting methods should be selected to meet the desired purpose and the site conditions. Consult an NRCS conservationist for assistance.

The cover crop can be terminated by harvest, frost, crimpers, mowing, tillage, and/or herbicide application. Burning of cover crop residues is not recommended. Any herbicides used should be compatible with the subsequent crop.

Maintenance

No maintenance considerations are available for this practice.

Relative Cost

Installation low ● ○ ○ ○ ○ high

Maintenance n / a

For Additional Information...

Visit the Indiana NRCS office online at <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/>, see the Indiana Job Sheet or the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) standard for (340) Cover Crop, or contact your local USDA-NRCS office

Local USDA-NRCS contact information