

COVER CROPS

Support Economic & Environmental Sustainability

POLICY PRIORITIES:

PRIORITIZE FARMER EDUCATION & TRAINING

There is widespread concern surrounding practical impediments that prevent cover crops from becoming more widely adopted. Farmers may not be aware of the direct economic benefits of cover crops or may lack the technical know-how to incorporate them into their operations. ASTA supports expanding training and education for farmers regarding the use of cover crops and methods to heighten the effectiveness of these initiatives.

MINIMIZE BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES

for enrolling in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and multi-year contracts. This will further encourage producers to use beneficial conservation practices. A commitment to advising producers on agronomically relevant information to better assist in the use of these programs would include, but aren't limited to: region-specific education on crop insurance, existing programs to offset cover crop expenses, and education surrounding new programs and opportunities for producers.

WHAT ARE COVER CROPS?

A cover crop is a plant that is used primarily to slow erosion, improve soil health, enhance water availability, smother weeds, help control pests and diseases, increase biodiversity and bring a host of other benefits on farms. In addition, they help improve farmer productivity and enhance carbon sequestration and sustainability.

Cover crop utilization holds both economic and environmental benefits by giving farmers the ability to better protect their crops and more effectively utilize fertilizer and crop protection products during the growing season.

Professionally produced seed is designed to help farmers achieve success through managing the use of the right seed, at the right place, at the right time.



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ADDITIONAL TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO SPECIALISTS

is needed to make sure that farmers have access to the programs that offset cover crop expenses. Further investments should be made to ensure agricultural advisors who provide technical assistance to producers on the uses and benefits of cover crops have the necessary training and education. Providing regionally appropriate instruction, and agronomically relevant information to USDA employees, extension agents, Soil Water and Conservation District employees, and other professionals who advise producers would help to reduce significant barriers in adoption.

TRANSPARENCY IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT

as the use of cover crops continues to rise. Farmers would benefit from a clear and transparent methodology to add species and varieties to the state recommended lists. This improved certainty will encourage private sector investment in variety development. We encourage USDA to explore the development and coordination of a uniform evaluation program for cover crops.

COVER CROPS REAP REWARDS FOR FARMERS

According to the 2019-20 ASTA, SARE, CTIC National Cover Crop Survey:

- Despite crippling rainfall that significantly delayed planting across much of the country, more than 90% of farmers reported that cover crops allowed them to plant earlier or at the same time as non-cover-cropped fields.
- Among those who had “planted green,” seeding cash crops into growing cover crops, 54% said the practice helped them plant earlier than on other fields.
- Following the use of cover crops, soybean, corn and spring wheat yields increased.
- Many farmers growing corn, soybeans, spring wheat, or cotton reported significant savings on production costs of fertilizers and/or herbicides.

For more information, visit:
www.sare.org/covercropsurvey.

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