

Digging Deeper: A Follow Up On Interseeding Cover Crops

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In the previous article (Winter 2016) we talked about interseeding in Cayuga County. An update from Jonathon Martin at Auburn Ag Products says that a total of a little over 1500 acres were interseeded this year- a significant increase over the previous year's totals. The reviews from growers are mixed but most are pleased with the results. It was a difficult year for interseeded cover, with below average soil moisture during a crucial time when the crop is establishing. There were many fields that emerged beautifully after corn was harvested. The best example found was a field located in southern Cayuga County where we measured 9-inch-tall Rye grass and 12-inch-long tillage radishes shortly after silage was cut.

There are many benefits to implementing a properly planned cover crop. Some can be seen in the first growing season, however most benefits will be observed after several years of use. One method of planting a cover crop is through the use of an interseeder. Using this implement insures that the cover crop does not compete for nutrients with your main crop. Interseeding typically takes place on corn staging V5 to V7, giving the cover the best chance to establish before the canopy closes. During the warmest parts of the growing season, and after the canopy closes, the cover goes dormant. It resumes growth after corn harvest. Interseeded covers have also been used on soybeans, with best results in a ridge till situation.

Each component of the seed mixture and the implementation of interseeding are designed to offer a grower the greatest benefit. Cover crops have been shown to increase the amounts of nutrients available for future crops by holding the nutrients until they are released the next spring. The tillage radish is an excellent example of a cover component that can provide nutrients. Tillage radishes have been shown to capture P, K, and S with the greatest gain coming in its N credits and organic matter due to its rapid decay. Successful uses of cover crops have been shown to provide a gain of organic matter of up to 1 percent over a 3 year period. Along with the nutrient gain the radishes are very effective at breaking up hard panned soils often producing tap roots growing to depths over 30 inches.

Other notable benefits of the interseeded cover are erosion control, water and air filtration, water holding capacity, and its ability to suppress weeds. Whatever form of cover cropping you decide to implement it's important to formulate a plan and commit to cover crops for more than 1 growing season. There are many benefits to incorporating a cover crop, it may take some time to realize its full potential.

If you have any interest in interseeding or cover crops for your operation contact your ACS Service Manager for more information.