

Huron Soil and Water Conservation District

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HURON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

**Great Lakes Restoration Initiative North Central Ohio Sediment Reduction Project
By Alisa Schaffer**

While rain may be putting a damper on farmers' plans this spring, cover crops may be one solution for getting in the fields earlier. For instance, the addition of cereal rye on poorly tilled areas help with moisture problems which may allow a farmer to plant beans earlier.

The Huron Soil and Water Conservation District's North Central Ohio Sediment Reduction Project Federal grant provides \$28.00 per acre up to 300 acres per operation per year up to three years to approved applicants who voluntarily add winter cover crops to their rotation excluding wheat in the Huron and Vermilion River watershed. Cover crops improve soil quality, improve fertility by adding nitrogen, suppress weeds and disease, and control insects.

Cover crops provide for erosion protection, add organic matter, help glue soils to provide good aeration and to be less prone to compaction, can add nitrogen, can help retain phosphorus by reducing erosion, and can help bring up calcium and potassium. Cover crops tend to reduce pest concerns, aid in drying out, and warming soils in cold, wet seasons.

The basic soil health principles are manage more by doing less; diversify with crops; grow a living root 365 days per year, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week; and keep soil covered. It is easy to deduct that the winter covered soil loses less top soil and nutrients necessary for plant growth. Furthermore, the more tillage, the greater the soil loss and interruption of soils natural physical, biological, and chemical cycling. Adding

a cover crop, helps to reduce the soil loss, build organic matter, and uptake nutrients. Plants need carbon and organic matter is 50% carbon. Also, worms are a good indicator of good soil health-40-50 worms per square meter.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Huron S.W.C.D. has cover crop resources that one may use or one may log onto the cover crop selector tool-
<http://www.mccc.msu.edu/SelectorTool/2011CCSelectorTool.pdf>

Net yields or net profit? While it may be debatable whether crop yields are increased or not, a decrease in net inputs like fertilizer through the addition of cover crops in one's rotation surely can lead to higher net profits.

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