

# AGRI-BUSINESS STEWARDSHIP NEWSLETTER

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The objective of this document is to provide you with current and helpful information regarding water protection, and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).

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## **Used properly, cover crops can provide numerous benefits to soil, water**

Cover crops are enjoying a greater focus among producers and agribusinesses nationwide as we learn more about their benefits to soil and water quality.

As the focus on cover crops is amplified in the media and among producers, it's important to thoroughly research cover crop application, plan alongside an agronomic professional, and map out goals for cover crop use to achieve maximum benefit.

Depending on the species and management, cover crops are effective tools to scavenge nutrients, produce nitrogen, slow erosion, control weeds and build soil quality.

Cover crops can have an important role in improving nutrient management and water quality. By reducing soil erosion, nutrients transport to water bodies can be reduced. Used properly, cover crops also provide a strategy to capture nutrients and improve nutrient cycling. Some cover crop species excel at recovering available N, retaining it for use by the following cash crop.

Legume cover crops produce their own N, reducing N needs for the following crop. Both options improve producer N management, reducing the chance for environmental losses.

Cover crops may also have a positive benefit in controlling phosphorus losses. While the mechanisms controlling P loss through soil erosion are well understood, researchers are just beginning to understand the benefits to reducing losses through tile drains. Additional research could help unlock additional water quality benefits achieved by planting cover crops.

Successful cover crop management requires clear goals and expectations, tailoring species selection, establishment practices and termination options to the intended purpose. The expanding scope of research on cover crops promises to increase the potential benefit of cover crops in Michigan agronomic systems.

Utilizing agronomy professionals and academic experts is essential for maximize the nutrient management and soil health benefits of cover crops.



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