

---

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).

---

## **Begin Planning for Fall Planted Cover Crops**

As the soybean and corn harvest seasons near, plans should begin to take shape for fall planted cover crops. Several considerations should be top of mind in this process, including the timing and method of establishment, the species that will be planted, site conditions in the field, the crop for next year and the termination plan. Many of these factors influence one another, so developing a plan heading into harvest for planting cover crops that includes contingencies for late harvest or unfavorable seeding conditions is essential.

Successfully using cover crops requires specific objectives and keeping goals in mind, such as improving soil structure, limiting soil or nutrient losses, or reducing weed pressure. With the wide array of cover crop species available, selecting the proper blend to meet these goals is necessary. Cover crop GDU requirements, lifespan, and root structure should be considered.

Harvest timing has a large influence on cover crop establishment. Aerial seeding can alleviate some of these challenges, and is a viable establishment option than can be done now. Following harvest, direct seeding can ensure good seed to soil contact for rapid emergence and growth, but the time and equipment maintenance requirements need to be weighed against the ease of surface broadcasting. Again, seed to soil contact is important, so light tillage following broadcast may improve development.

Planning cover crop use with the 2018 crop in mind is essential. Some species can create additional challenges for specific crops in the spring, so consult experts in developing a blend. High biomass crops like rye have high moisture requirements, but can also create residue mats that may limit soil evaporation and delay spring field operations. Large amounts of residue can also easily interfere with tillage and planting operations. Termination plans are essential to kill cover crops at a manageable stage. Planting into living cover crops takes flexible management and brings greater risks, so cover crop beginners should be careful relying on the practice. While planning for termination, care should also be taken not to mitigate any benefits the cover crops have provided.

Cover crops increase the level of agronomy management required, but can be an important part of increasing short and long-term profitability. Crop advisors can be a trusted resource in their management and should be consulted early in the process to help ensure all factors are considered. With careful management and proactive planning, producers can find cover crops to be an important economic and environmental benefit.



**Developed and Paid for by  
Nitrogen and Pesticide Fees.  
Distributed by the Michigan Agri-Business Association**

