

DO COVER CROPS INCREASE OR DECREASE CROP YIELDS?

Matt Ruark ^{1/}

Cover crops are a conservation management practice that can reduce soil erosion, reduce nitrate leaching to groundwater, and increase soil organic matter. However, use management of cover crops can be challenging, especially in the upper Midwest, where little growing season is left following harvest of corn or soybean. Additionally, termination of cover crops in the spring can be a challenge depending on spring growing conditions. Different organizations and researchers have conducted studies to assess if cover crops "work" in the Midwest, and results have ranged from clear decreases in corn yield to clear increases in corn yield. This presentation will be a thorough review of recent studies across the Midwest that assess the impact of cover crops on the subsequent crops yield. The presentation will also seek to address what cover crop management strategies should be implemented to reduce any short-term risk in order to achieve the long-term benefits of cover crops on soil health.

^{1/} Associate Professor, Dept. of Soil Science, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, 1525 Observatory Drive, Madison, WI 53706.