

Matt VanTilburg
Celina, Ohio

At the recent 2-day cover crop conference in Decatur, IL, Matt VanTilburg described his strip-till recipe for successful cover cropping in Ohio.

"I've been using annual ryegrass as a cover crop for about six years and sometimes had trouble seeding it in a timely fashion," said the Celina, Ohio farmer of about 4000 acres." Annual ryegrass needs about 40 days growth in the fall before a killing frost and it wasn't always possible to get a seed drill in there after harvest. He tried seeding into standing corn, too, both from a rudimentary liquid sprayer boom and also from a plane.

In the past two years, VanTilberg has strip-tilled his cover crop land, planting into standing corn and soybeans using a "high-boy" equipped with a bulk seed tank mounted on a Walker sprayer with a 90-foot boom. Once the ryegrass is about 3 – 4 inches high, he comes back in and strip tills with a Soil Warrior strip till vertical tillage tool. "Strip tilling gives me clean rows in which to plant next year," VanTilburg said. With annual ryegrass on the bulk of the field, all the other benefits of cover crops are still present: erosion control, nutrient containment, deep rooting, compaction relief and soil health.

Part of the beauty of VanTilberg's seeding apparatus is the delivery of seed. Rather than broadcasting it, VanTilberg's system delivers seed directly to the seed bed, underneath the foliage. Seed is blown across the boom to PVC drop tubes every 30 inches. "The drops have deflectors at the bottom so we get even distribution." Metering rollers register the rate of application and VanTilberg usually applies 18lb. of annual ryegrass per acre.

This fall, he planted a mix of annual ryegrass and radish, to see if the big tap roots of the radish are complimentary to the fibrous roots developed by the annual ryegrass. "Moving to strip-till has also helped in the spring, because there's no more problems with cornstalk residue nor with planting into annual ryegrass roots. Sometimes, we'd see such a mass of annual ryegrass roots in the rows that it was more difficult to close the "vee" after planting corn.

VanTilberg commented on the success of his cover crop program this way: "My highest yielding corn is from cover crop acres, simply because the annual ryegrass has created better soil." He also said that this fall, with more rainfall, it was still possible to drive over cover crop acres, whereas bare ground was too soggy. "Cover crops definitely give you more firmness," he said.

When asked about control of annual ryegrass in the spring, VanTilberg said, "I use the recommended amount of RoundUp Max (44 oz.) along with 17 lb. of ammonium sulphate and apply it at 15 gallons/acre...and I haven't had any problems whatsoever."

