News Release

Cover Crops this Fall to Save Nitrogen Costs Next Year

All that corn in the field, dying. And with it, the prospect of additional losses of nitrogen fertilizer. If fields are mowed, or plowed under, in the wake of no-show corn, what happens to the nitrogen this fall, when the rains come? Leached out, poured into streams and rivers, sent to the already toxic Gulf of Mexico.

Cover crops, like annual ryegrass, prevent erosion. Just as importantly, they sequester nitrogen, acquiring what's been left in the soil (normally 100-200 pounds/acre) and make much of it available next July, when maturing corn is looking for a boost.

Economically strapped farmers may be loathe to invest in cover crop seed for the fall when their insurance checks are still pending. Even more so for those without insurance. But if they're going to plant corn next year, a cover crop this winter will be a huge asset next year. Even without a return on their corn investment this year, planting a cover crop can prevent further losses to erosion, while storing nitrogen for the crop next July and building soil more tolerant of drought.

Drought-stricken corn field: June 16 (left) and July 2 (right) - Robertson Farm, Benton, IL

Annual ryegrass, planted this fall (Aug. and early Sept), will send roots down to five feet in no-till acres, breaking up compaction and mining nutrients in deeper soil. Next spring, the nitrogen-rich cover crop will be killed before planting corn, and can give back as much as 70 percent of the stored nitrogen to maturing corn plants. Meanwhile, the deep roots of annual ryegrass become part of the growth of organic matter in healthy soil, even as corn roots grow past to reach deeper moisture in a dry year.

More info: www.ryegrasscovercrop.com

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