

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

 Cooperative
Extension Service



Farm Update

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AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES
EDUCATION

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Cover Crop Utilization

Cover crop utilization on cropland has increased in popularity with several thousand acres planted across the county each year. The number one goal of cover crops should be soil erosion control. There are research proven soil health benefits to whole farm cover crop utilization, but time and cost of whole farm seeding may not be feasible. Focus cover crops first on fields and areas within fields that are most at risk of overwinter soil erosion. The first step to reducing overwinter soil erosion is stopping fall tillage, especially on rolling land.

Cover crops take up and hold nutrients, especially nitrogen, that was not used by the previous crop. Cover crops may also reduce winter annual weeds by competing with them for space and nutrients and by providing a mulch to cover the soil surface. General cover crop management is to plant in the fall and kill it out in the spring. Wheat grown for grain harvest is also an excellent cover crop. If the straw is left on the field after wheat harvest and no-till soybean production is implemented, there's no other winter planted crop that has the likelihood of increasing soil organic matter and reducing winter and early spring soil erosion better than growing wheat for grain.

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In addition to wheat, cereal rye is a great overall small grain cover crop. It can be seeded from August to mid-November. Rye germinates quickly, grows fast, and provides good winter cover if not planted too late. Early planting is important for soil protection and uptake of nutrients left over from the previous crop. Rye is effective in suppressing weeds. It resumes growth early in the spring and may produce too much top growth if not killed soon enough. For seeding as a cover crop, use two bushels of seed per acre. Up to three bushels of seed per acre should be used if the rye is to be grazed or cut for hay.

Hairy vetch is probably the most reliable and most productive winter legume cover crop adapted to Kentucky. It is easy to establish and is winter hardy throughout the state. Hairy vetch has the disadvantage of producing a significant percentage of hard seed that do not germinate the first year, but will often germinate later. This can create problems with it volunteering into future crops. Also, to provide good winter cover, plant hairy vetch in late August or early September; use 20 to 30 pounds of seed per acre and cover about 1-inch deep. Hairy vetch can be difficult to kill early in the spring, although glyphosate or gramoxone with a small amount of dicamba can be effective.

Daikon radishes are widely planted in the fall as a winter cover crop. Daikon radishes are known to grow large tap roots when planted in early fall with the intent of reducing surface soil compaction. They can be effective in this but are expensive, they will winter kill, and rot quickly exposing loosened, bare soil subject to erosion during late winter. If planted on slopes or with the intent of reducing winter soil erosion, a small grain such as wheat should be planted as a companion crop. Their use is most effective in fields where surface compaction is an issue.

Chute Side BQCA Training

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A beef cattle production educational event is planned for this coming Tuesday, September 12 at Kentuckiana Livestock Market with introductions and meal, beginning at 5:15 p.m., and program at 6:00. Participants will hear from UK Extension Specialists on topics related to techniques on improved beef animal handling and care. The latest information on genomic testing for desirable traits, on-farm pregnancy testing, and considerations for when to cull cows from the herd will be discussed. Body condition scoring and preparing for the winter feeding season is on the agenda. Participants will be divided into groups and rotated through multiple stations related the topics above. At the program conclusion, attendees will have the opportunity to apply for or renew their Beef Quality Care and Assurance Certification. BQCA is a prerequisite for selling in the CPH60 cattle sales and for reimbursement of cattle related expenditures in the CAIP cost share program. Call my office at 270 685 -8480 or email me at chardy@uky.edu to register.

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