

Cover Crops Faring Well In Southern Illinois



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The southern Illinois area is progressing well towards harvest. Areas in northern Illinois appear a bit more questionable.

I have been checking prevented planted fields that were planted into cover crops due to the wet spring conditions. Most look impressive. Hairy vetch that was planted the end of July looks great, and many fields have already produced over 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre. The big question is whether they winter kill and whether the nitrogen is lost over the winter.

Some producers are already planning to over-seed cereal rye to capture the nitrogen if the fields winter kill. Some vetch fields were planted with annual ryegrass, which is now 3 to 4 inches tall. But, I suspect the vetch will smother out the ryegrass in the next month.

The crimson clover that was planted in August is also growing well, with many fields 3 to 4 inches tall. I have observed several hundred

acres that had annual ryegrass seeded with the crimson, and those fields look real good. The idea was that if the crimson clover winter killed from planting too early, the ryegrass would uptake the nitrogen, carrying it until spring for the corn crop.

This year, I am working with a group of producers across the Midwest to study cover crops. We are looking at planting dates, aerial seeding and varieties. The hope is to identify the optimum planting date and fine-tune the management to get the greatest benefit, thus improving the success of cover crop production. Many of the locations intend to plant no-till corn across the plots with different nitrogen rates to look at nitrogen utilization. These plots should provide some interesting results.

Several field days are being planned in southern Illinois, including one at Geff on November 18 and another at Campbell Hill on November 11. Other dates/locations may be offered. Watch this column for more details throughout the fall and next spring. Δ

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