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Farmers use diverse cover crop management practices

July 4, 2022



An Indiana farmer “plants green,” seeding corn directly into a 12-way cover crop mix. Photo by Brandon O'Connor, Indiana NRCS.

Cover crops have many on- and off-farm benefits, but they also have on-farm costs. Previous research has found that those costs and perceived risks can be a barrier to adoption.

In a new *Agricultural & Environmental Letters* article, researchers summarize data on cover crop management practices and costs from 112 farmers who participated in the National Corn Growers Association's **Soil Health Partnership** program.

The team found that farmers varied planting time, method, and other practices to adapt cover crops to their systems. Although the median cost to plant cover crops in 2021 was $40/ac, costs varied with management. For example, drilling the cover crop was the most popular seeding method but costs more than broadcasting the seed. Farmers experimented with species composition and rates and tried more complex management practices over time, such as planting cash crop seeds directly into a live cover crop or "planting green."

Variable profitability and the costs of experimentation, among other factors, may make it challenging for farmers to develop realistic expectations about whether cover crops will be profitable on *their* farms. This study suggests that future research evaluating the agronomic, environmental, and economic outcomes of cover crops could contribute to filling this information gap.

Dig deeper

Bowman, M., Poley, K., & McFarland, E. (2022). Farmers employ diverse cover crop management strategies to meet soil health goals. *Agricultural & Environmental Letters*, *7*, e20070. **https://doi.org/10.1002/ael2.20070**

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