

The USC Cover Crop Initiative to Bring Answers to Producer's Questions in the New York



Cover crops are being used on farms in our region to minimize erosion, maximize nutrient uptake in the fall, improve soil health, and increase organic matter and field trafficability. As fertilizer prices continue to increase and producers aim to reduce N loss to the environment, they are asking about the nitrogen (N) benefits of cover crops for corn silage systems.

To begin addressing these questions and with the aim of stimulating cover crop implementation on corn silage acres in New York, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) of 16 Conservation Districts is piloting a Cover Crop Initiative through an interactive outreach approach sponsored by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the New York Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The project approach is to engage farmers, District technicians and extension agents to develop and deliver information on the economic and environmental benefits of cover cropping systems. The Initiative will compare end of season nitrate capture and N release in spring and summer as impacted by cover crop species, biomass, timing and method of cover termination, and to test various tools for N management in cover-crop based corn systems. If optimum corn yield can be obtained at lower N application rates for corn following a cover crop, many New York dairy producers will reduce purchased fertilizer N. This will reduce costs to producers by \$20 to \$30/acre, reduce losses of N to the environment, and reduce reliance on fossil fuel needed to produce, distribute and apply N fertilizer. In addition, this project will work in conjunction with a state grant that is using a local Conservation District to test a variety of custom cover crop application methods on farmer fields. The trial will analyze the economic feasibility of one application method over another and evaluate whether or not it is a viable option for both Districts and producers in the future. Outreach will include field day demonstrations and an annual workshop in November to highlight benefits and share ideas on how producers in our region are overcoming the challenges of cover crop implementation on their farms.

To find out more about the USC Cover Crop Initiative please visit our website at www.u-s-c.org or contact, Aaron Ristow, Ag Coordinator for the USC at www.aaronristow@tcsxcd.org.

