

- eEdition
- Homepage
- News
- Sports
- Opinion
- Features
- Multimedia
- Obituaries
- Classifieds
- Subscriber Services
- TV Listings
- Valley Homes
- Coupons
- Shopping
- Email Headlines
- News Tips
- Contact Us
- ClickLocal
- Photos
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Site Map

News

January 27, 2013 'Cover crops' helping Valley farmers recover from drought

Many planting clover, turnips to help soil Howard Greninger The Tribune-Star

TERRE HAUTE — Following last year's record-setting drought, some Vigo County farmers have turned to cover crops to help trap nitrogen in the ground to benefit this year's crops.

"We were really encouraging people to plant them this past fall after the drought because if you have a drought and have low corn yields, that means you will have more residual nitrogen in the soil. The corn crop did not really grow and use the nitrogen that was applied," said Eileen Kladviko, professor of agronomy at Purdue University.

The residual nitrate can leach out of the soil into nearby streams, eventually getting into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. "Cover crops are a good practice regardless of the type of year," Kladviko said.

Cover crops can include clover, radishes and even turnips. The crops not only capture nitrogen, but also help build organic soil matter, Kladviko said.

"Cover crop use has grown tremendously in Indiana and Ohio in the last three years, but it still is a relatively small percent of farmers. It still is probably less than 10 percent of the farmers statewide [in Indiana] that are using cover crops," Kladviko said.

Five years ago, that percentage would be closer to 2 percent of Hoosier farmers using cover crops, she said. "There is tremendous interest, so there are a number of people who are seriously considering it who have not done it yet," Kladviko said.

While turnips are not a common cover crop, their use has increased.

"A turnip does scavenge a lot of nitrogen. If people have cattle, then sometimes turnips can be good for grazing," Kladviko said. Also the turnip has a tap root that deeply penetrates the soil, helping uncompact the soil.

This is the first year that Roger Sturgeon, who farms about 1,900 acres just north of Riley, has planted a cover crop. He planted 120 acres as a test area using a mixture that is about 82 percent clover, with 3 percent in turnips and the rest in radishes.

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Related Photos



Friendly: Vigo County farmer Phil Carter kneels in a field covered for the winter in rye. The grass is used to help prevent erosion. (Tribune-Star/Jim Avelis)



Covering up: Turnips and radishes make up part of the cover crop Roger Sturgeon is experimenting with this winter. The Vigo County farmer has about 125 acres covered up with the root vegetables mixed in with clover. (Tribune-Star/Jim Avelis)

Discussion

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"The clover is actually supposed to generate nitrogen, somewhere around 75 to 100 pounds of nitrogen could be put back into the ground," Sturgeon said.

He planted radishes and turnips not to collect nitrogen, but instead to use their root systems to break up compaction of the soil. "The previous crop in the field was wheat. Because of the drought and the ground was so hard, I was not able to put in a double crop of beans last summer," Sturgeon said.

"I just decided since I didn't have anything growing there, I had plenty of time to plant a cover crop. It is something new and have never done before, but it seems like cover crops are gaining in popularity and are coming back," Sturgeon said.

"I did it mainly because of the drought as the ground was going to sit idle without the beans. The whole idea behind cover crops is the ground is actually healthier if you have something growing there," Sturgeon said.

Cover crops that do not die in the winter or have volunteer sprouts that become active in the spring are killed off with a herbicide about 10 to 14 days before cash crops of corn or soybeans are planted.

Sturgeon describes himself as a minimal till farmer and plans to watch how the land with a cover crop performs. "If my socks are just knocked off and it is 200 bushel corn and all the rest in 160 bushel, then I will know it will have made a big difference," he said.

This fall, Sturgeon said he plans to try a side-by-side test of land, with one area in cover crops next to land without a cover crop.

Farmer Phil Carter said the 2012 drought made it a "perfect storm" for farmers to plant cover crops.

"There has been a big push from the soil conservation services and the state Department of Agriculture encouraging farmers to plant cover crops. This year people have the time [with many fields decimated] and it makes sense to do it," he said.

Carter has used cover crops for seven years. This year he has 55 percent of the 1,200 acres he farms, north of Lewis, sown with cover crops. He primarily uses an annual rye grass. He also uses cereal rye, similar to wheat, and oilseed radishes.

"I like radishes to break up soil compaction, but the problem is they have to be planted in late August to get the most benefit from them and most of the time our crops don't come off until mid September, late October," Carter said.

"The reason I use annual rye grass is it is very deep rooted and brings up nutrients up from the subsoil. Then when you till it or burn it back to plant corn or beans, it brings those nutrients up to the top and you have them for the future," Carter said.

The primary reason Carter said he uses cover crops is to protect soil from erosion. An added benefit is it helps soil from losing nutrients. "If there is any free nitrogen in the soil, it will tie it up until next spring's crop," he said.

"A third reason for cover crops is soil where you grow cover crops has a better tilth to it," Carter said. "The soil is more fluffy, loamy, easier to work with and not as compacted. It just makes your soil healthier."

Timing is important on cover crops, Carter said. Planting has to be timely in the fall to get the plants established before a frost or freeze. And, if the plants are killed too soon in the spring, "you do not get all of the benefits. If you kill them too late, they can take moisture out of the soil," Carter said.

Likewise, if the cover crop, such as rye grass, gets too large when killed and lays down, it can retain too much moisture during a wet period. However, it can also retain water in a dry period.

"The big push on cover crops is to have something green on the soil for more months out of the year than just the five months you have crops growing on them," Carter said.

"Go back 50 years, the rotations people had were corn, soybeans and wheat. After the wheat, people planted clover or alfalfa so we had some kind of cover crop on the soils 80 percent of the time," Carter said. "We have gotten away from that and are just growing corn and soybeans. Winter wheat and clover are not in our rotation any more so we don't have the cover crops to protect the soil.

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"Farmers don't have livestock anymore to pasture on the clover. It is so much more profitable to plan corn and soybeans. The dynamics of agriculture has changed so much in the last six years and the economics determine that we grow corn and soybeans," he said.

Reporter Howard Greninger can be reached at (812) 231-4204 or howard.greninger@tribstar.com.

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News

Nonprofit organizations receive distributions from local trusts



Red Cross and 49 other nonprofit organizations received distributions from trusts established by Oscar Baur, Frederick R. Benson, Mary Smith Young and Sheldon Swope. The four prominent Terre Haute citizens established trusts through their wills at First Financial Bank.

January 31, 2013 3 Photos

Pathologist: Homicide victim 'throttled'

Introduction of evidence took up the majority of testimony Wednesday in the murder trial of a 1979 homicide.

January 31, 2013

Calendar not set for Clay schools

After lengthy discussion Wednesday night concerning proposed scheduling changes, the future of Clay Community Schools' calendar remains hanging in the balance.

January 31, 2013

MARK BENNETT: America's best quality of life? Indiana must address flaws, set priorities



Just as the job interview seems smooth, the interviewer drops the question.

"So, where do you see yourself in five years?"

January 31, 2013 1 Photo

Woman abandons vehicle before it's hit by train

A Terre Haute woman was forced to abandon her car just before it was struck by a train early Wednesday morning.

January 31, 2013

New TH sewer bills on the way

Thousands of Terre Haute area residents should be getting their new sewer bills before the end of this week, city officials said Wednesday.

January 31, 2013

Efforts under way to determine number of homeless in Terre Haute



Charles Harrison looked comfortable outside Terre Haute's Bethany House, a homeless shelter that also provides food and clothing to the city's neediest residents. Standing across the frame of his bicycle, he laughed with a friend and joked about "living" homelessness every day, not just once in a while like some in the news media who try to "get a feel" for the experience.

January 31, 2013 2 Photos

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10 Things to Know for Thursday

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What's going on Jan. 31

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Multimedia



Indiana State's Jake Odum, right, drives on Wichita State's Ehimen Orukpe (21) in the second half during an NCAA college basketball game in Wichita, Kan., Tuesday, Jan. 29, 2013. (AP Photo/The Wichita Eagle, Fernando Salazar)

VIDEO: ISU knocks off No. 15 Wichita State Jan 30, 2013 10 Photos 3 Links

VIDEO: Sycamores' aggressive rebounding plays big part in pulling away from SIU Jan 18, 2013 1 Photo 1 Video

VIDEO: Workmanlike Sycamores drop Bradley 68-53 Jan 10, 2013 4 Photos 2 Links

VIDEOS: ISU's Odum breaks Miami in OT Dec 26, 2012 2 Photos 2 Links 1 Comment and 0 Reactions

VIDEO: ISU's upset bid slips through turnover-prone fingers Dec 24, 2012 2 Photos

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Hoosier Academies hosts info events

Susan Savant had several questions Wednesday for Rachael Borrelli, a community coordinator for Hoosier Academies, a state-accredited charter school that offers a fully online option.

January 31, 2013 1 Photo

Vermillion sheriff's efforts result in 13 AEDs

A close call involving a deputy helped jump start an area sheriff's plan to place AEDs in each of his officers' vehicles, a plan which came to fruition Wednesday. Vermillion County Sheriff Bob Spence said overwhelming support via community donations has allowed him to purchase 13 automated external defibrillator units with more yet on the way.

January 31, 2013 1 Photo

UPDATE: Eastern Greene County suffers heavy storm damage

GREENE COUNTY — At 2:30 a.m. today the Greene County Sheriff's Department reported heavy structural damage to several residences on Indiana 43 from Solsberry to Hendricksville in eastern Greene County.

January 30, 2013

Casey to Tee it up: Town looking for another place in world record book

The small town of Casey, Ill., is taking a novel — or novelty — approach to economic development.

January 30, 2013 4 Photos

Opening statements focus on DNA

In an opening statement Tuesday in Vigo County Superior Court 6, prosecutors said two witnesses will show that Richard L. Boswell Jr. committed murder and attempted murder in 1979.

January 30, 2013 1 Photo

Chicago media wait outside Terre Haute prison for former Gov. Ryan's release

TERRE HAUTE — If former Illinois Gov. George Ryan thought he was forgotten during his five years in prison, a quick look outside the Terre Haute federal penitentiary Tuesday would have shown him he was not.

January 30, 2013 2 Photos

Central-city apartment house fire displaces one

An apartment house fire Tuesday in the 100 block of Kent Avenue was limited to the bedroom of a man who used a bucket full of cigarette butts as an ashtray.

January 30, 2013 2 Photos

Hinsenkamp named executive director of economic agency

The multi-county board of directors of the West Central Indiana Economic Development District has named Ron Hinsenkamp, former chief transportation planner of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, as the organization's new executive director.

January 30, 2013

Neighborhood meeting to discuss water quality

The Terre Town Neighborhood Association is meeting Thursday night to discuss — among

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Community Calendar

- Thu
- Fri
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- Feb 2 Alzheimer's Association Greater ...
- Feb 7 The No Divas Tour featuring Roxi...
- Feb 2 Wabash Valley Scottish Society

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other things – water quality in the north-side neighborhood.

January 30, 2013

STATE OF THE STATEHOUSE: Legislation calls for new state water management agency

Indiana's polluted streams, chronically flooded areas and rising demand for water in fast-growing parts of the state are among the reasons cited for having a state "water czar."

January 30, 2013

Ivy Tech-WV enrollment plunge leads to belt tightening

Enrollment at Ivy Tech-Wabash Valley dropped 8.2 percent last fall, prompting budget cuts and program evaluation.

January 30, 2013

Greater Terre Haute Branch of NAACP swears in new leadership



Wabash Valley civil rights leaders are ready to start a new push for social equality and the elimination of racial hatred through the local branch of the NAACP.

January 30, 2013 1 Photo

Ex-Illinois Gov. Ryan faces changed world after prison

CHICAGO — When former Illinois Gov. George Ryan steps out of prison on Wednesday after serving five-plus years for corruption, he will return to a life altered by personal tragedy and to a state altered by his and his successor's legacy of corruption.

January 30, 2013

Trial gets under way today for 1979 cold-case homicide



Opening statements are to be made this morning in the trial of a Riley man accused in a 1979 cold-case homicide.

January 29, 2013 2 Photos

Fire destroys apartment house



A fire in the 1300 block of Chestnut Street early Monday destroyed a two-story apartment house and displaced several residents.

January 29, 2013 1 Photo

Housing plan for ISU moves forward

Indiana State University may be one step closer to offering downtown student housing.

January 29, 2013

Road repairs concern farmers

County road repairs, bridge widths and taxes were all questions farmers raised to county officials in a round table discussion Monday.

January 29, 2013

Police arrest two suspects on burglary charges

Two men who police believe were attempting to burglarize a house in southern Vigo County were arrested after the owner came home and found the intruders' vehicle in the driveway.

January 29, 2013

State health officer: Indiana in grip of flu season

Dr. William VanNess didn't have to wait long before executing his duties as Indiana's new top public health officer.

January 29, 2013

Readers' forum: Jan. 27, 2013

10 comments · 1 day ago

RONN MOTT: An encounter with the Indiana Militia

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READERS' FORUM: Jan. 22, 2013

25 comments · 1 day ago

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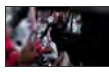
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TH parks department looking to share ideas on five-year master plan

The Terre Haute Parks & Recreation Department is planning a meeting with invited stakeholders from the surrounding community. This meeting is designed to share ideas for a five-year parks master plan.

January 29, 2013

Woman gets 20 years for apartment fire

A woman who admitted to setting a January 2012 apartment fire has been sentenced to 20 years in prison.

January 29, 2013

Harlan to chair Vigo County Park Board

Peggy Harlan will serve as chair of the Vigo County Park Board in 2013, the first female elected to the top board post since the parks and recreation department was formed in 1967.

January 29, 2013

Numbers Game: Heated game of bingo called despite cold weather



Even though the weather was cold and wet, a group of seniors gathered Sunday at the Wabash Senior Activity Center Sunday to try their luck.

January 28, 2013 3 Photos

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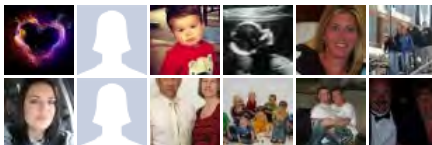
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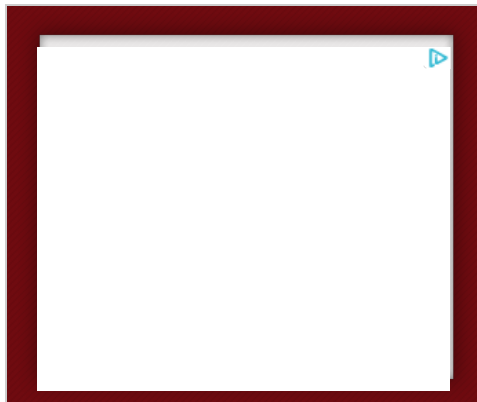
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