

COVER CROPS

Working with private landowners across Iowa, cover crops are being implemented as water quality and crop production practices with emphasis in priority watersheds.

THE BASICS

Many Iowa farmers plant cover crops, which are typically oats or winter cereal rye, in the fall as a key component of a successful corn-soybean crop rotation system.

Cover crops help improve water quality by protecting soil and reducing nutrient loss between harvest and planting next year. Cover crops benefit soil as well, by improving its structure and health. In addition, cover crops offer production benefits, including weed suppression, increased water infiltration forage for livestock.



THE BENEFITS

- Reduce soil loss from wind and water erosion.
- Reduce leaching of nitrogen, phosphorus and other nutrients.
- Slow water and reduce field runoff.
- Improve soil health and structure.
- Suppress weed growth.
- Improve soil permeability and water infiltration.
- Provide supplemental feed for livestock.



END RESULT:
CLEANER WATER
HEALTHIER SOIL



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE &
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Division of Soil Conservation and Water Quality

IMPROVING IOWA WATER QUALITY

COVER CROPS

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RESEARCH

In 2023, Iowans planted nearly 3 million acres of cover crops. In addition, 434,000 acres were enrolled in the state's Water Quality Initiative in 2022. Research has shown that:

- Rye cover crops can reduce nitrates by 31%.
- Oat cover crops can reduce nitrates by 28%.
- Planting cover crops in late summer or early fall can reduce phosphate losses by 29%.



IOWA WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE SITES

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is working with landowners across the state to plant many more acres of cover crops. For more information or to seed your land to cover crops, contact your local USDA Service Center/Soil & Water Conservation District.

