
Practical Cover Cropper - Cover crop perspectives from Pennsylvania to Iowa + Research trial enrollment

From Beth Waage <beth.waage@practicalfarmers.org>

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To Anna Pesek <anna.pesek@practicalfarmers.org>



February 2025

Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.



Cover crop perspectives from Pennsylvania to Iowa

PFI members **Ben and Bryanna Harner** farm in Columbus Junction, Iowa, where they have a wean-to-finish swine operation for Niman Ranch. They produce 6500-7000 hogs per year, and work with two other producers who custom feed to help them reach those numbers. Prior to their move to Iowa in 2019, the couple farmed in Pennsylvania where they planted 100 acres of cover crops.

Presently, the Harner's plant a 75% rye and 25% crimson clover mix at a rate of 30-35 pounds per acre and apply it by drone at the beginning of September. They will do a burndown of the cover crop before planting corn this spring.

In the future, Ben wants to apply the cover crop right after harvest at a rate of 60-90 pounds of rye per acre. Because they contract the drone, increasing the amount of flying time to increase the rate applied is cost prohibitive in addition to seed costs. Bryanna also wants to try different cover crop mixes in the future.

Ben and Bryanna farm fewer acres in Iowa than they did in Pennsylvania and reflect on some of the differences in cover crop adoption between the states. While farming in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, there was a significant amount of funding and resources available to prevent erosion and runoff into the bay. Cover crop use was also more widespread, and they received more per acre in Pennsylvania's cost-share programs.

Bryanna says, **"Ben and I have learned that farming is not a "one size fits all" approach, and we have found success stepping outside of our comfort zone."**

PROGRAM UPDATES

Join two PFI on-farm research projects



Are you ready to put your soil health to the test with on-farm research?

PFI is currently seeking participants for two on-farm research trials. Both trials are compensated.

- Can We Reduce N Rates to Corn and Improve ROI?
- Do Cover Crops Increase the Number of Days Suitable for Field Work?

Enroll in on-farm research today.

Enroll in our N Rate Risk Protection Program



Are you looking to save inputs on your corn crop?

The N Rate Risk Protection Program is free to participate in and helps you lower your risk as you reduce nitrogen expenses – saving you money and increasing your farm's resiliency.

[Check to see if you are eligible and to sign up.](#)

IN THE FIELD

Blog: "Clover Cover Crop Management"



Kevin Shelley is a farm nutrient and cover crop specialist with University of Wisconsin Extension. In this blog post recapping a past small grains shared learning call, he shares his experience working with corn, soy, wheat or red clover rotations at research stations and on his own farm.

Kevin also shares lessons he learned with clover establishment, management and termination.

[Read this PFI blog.](#)

Research report: "Corn Following Clover and Rye Cover Crops"

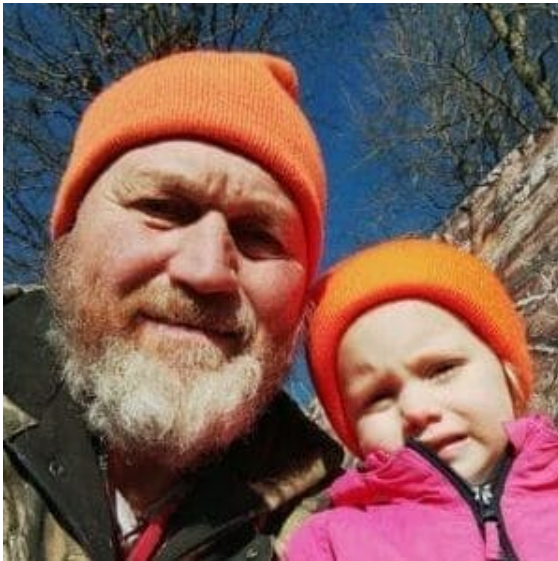


PFI member farmer **Arlyn Kauffman** frost-seeded clover cover crops into a cereal rye seed crop, intending to compare it to a cover crop mix seeded after cereal rye seed harvest in July.

Due to dry conditions after rye seed harvest, Arlyn ultimately pivoted to compare the effects of red clover and cereal rye cover crops on corn yield.

[Read the key findings from the 2021 report.](#)

Frost-seeding and managing red clover



Roger Wenning of Decatur County, Indiana, frost-seeds red clover in early spring with dry fertilizer for his wheat crop.

He has tried other cover crop mixes following his wheat harvest but found frost-seeding red clover to be the most consistent and reliable.

[Read more in this blog from 2022.](#)

Additional resources

- ISU Integrated Pest Management video: **["Frost-seeding Red Clover into Hybrid Rye Plots With a Drone"](#)**
- Penn State Extension article: **["Frost Seeding for Cover Crop or Forage Establishment"](#)**
- Land Stewardship Project fact sheet: **["Frost Seeding Cover Crops"](#)**

UPCOMING EVENTS

Reserve your hotel room now: 2025 Midwest Cover and Grains Conference



Wednesday, March 5 | 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

March will be here before we know it and so will the third annual Midwest Covers and Grains Conference at Great Wolf Lodge in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Secure your hotel room at just \$99 with our group rate by Feb. 11 before rates increase.

This one-day event will explore topics on everything from interseeding cover crops into corn to finding viable market options for small grains. **Register today.**

Webinar: "Soil Studies: Exploring Creative Residue Management and Soil Amendments in a Four-Crop Rotation"



Tuesday, Feb. 18 | Noon-1 p.m. | Online

Norm Lamothe and the team at Woodleigh Farms have made many changes to improve soil health, including finding creative ways of managing residue in the field.

Attend this webinar to hear what the Woodleigh team has found about the impacts of extended rotation, cover crops and organic amendments on soil health.

Register for this winter webinar.

Webinar: "Optimal Nitrogen Fertilizer Rates for Corn"



Tuesday, March 11 | Noon-1 p.m. | Online

ISU professor **Sotirios Archontoulis**, specializes in integrated cropping systems. He will discuss the results of new research on the optimal nitrogen fertilizer rate for corn at this winter webinar.

He'll also discuss how plant population, hybrids, soil and weather can all affect the optimal rate, and what that can mean for corn and grain yields

Register for this winter webinar.

Friends of PFI events

Feb. 8-9: Farm Expo – Western Illinois University Ag Mech Farm Expo

*Hosted by: Western Illinois University
Macomb, IL*

***Visit PFI staff at this event**

Feb. 13: Virtual Field Day – Can Precision Planting of Cereal Rye Mitigate Corn Seedling Disease and Yield Drag?

*Hosted by: Iowa Learning Farms
1-2 p.m. | Virtual*

Feb. 20-22: Conference – Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference

*Hosted by: Marbleseed
La Crosse, Wisconsin*

***Visit PFI staff at this event**

Feb. 11: Webinar – Quantifying and Valorizing Ecosystem Service Benefits for Perennial Groundcover in Corn and Soybean Production

Hosted by: RegenPGC and Iowa State University

Noon-1 p.m. | Online

Feb. 18: Meeting – Annual Cover Crop & Conservation Meeting

Hosted by: Sponheim Sales and Service

9:30 a.m. | Osage, IA

March 1: Farm Show – SE Iowa Farm Show

Hosted by: Fairfield Arts and Convention Center

9 a.m.-2 p.m. | Fairfield, IA

***Visit PFI staff at this event**

[View our events calendar](#)

Contact our team

Beth Waage

Field Crops Education Coordinator

beth.waage@practicalfarmers.org

Chat with our cover crops team by calling the PFI office at (515)-232-5661.

Donate today

Join Practical Farmers



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1615 Golden Aspen Dr Suite 101

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