

SPREADIN' THE NEWS

Fall/Winter 2026

Cover Crops: Your Soils' First-line of Defense

When you think of cover crops, chances are you think of the typical wheat, radish, annual rye and clover species; but did you know there are additional options when it comes to seeding a cover crop to meet your operation's goals?

Determine your goals

First and foremost, you have to ask yourself what you wish to glean from cover crops. Are you looking to increase soil organic matter (OM%) or break up compaction layers? Is your goal to utilize your acreage for more than just row crops and to have another feed source for your livestock? Are you enrolled in a program (i.e., H2Ohio or USDA-NRCS EQIP) that has certain requirements for cover crop compliance such as seeding deadline, seeding rate per acre and termination timeframe? All of these are valid questions to consider before planting a cover crop regardless of time of year.

Select a species

Cover crops are categorized into three different types: grasses, legumes, and brassicas, meaning there is something to meet everyone's needs. Grasses such as rye, oats, barley and wheat are primarily used to increase soil OM% and control soil erosion. Legumes include clover, alfalfa, hairy vetch, and field peas which are highly sought after for their ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen enriching the soil with the macronutrient. Finally brassicas, also know as "soil disturbers," penetrate compacted soil with their deep taproots improving aeration. Brassicas include but are not limited to radishes, mustards and turnips. Each cover crop type has unique benefits, but when you have the ability to mix them together, a trifecta of soil advantages occur.

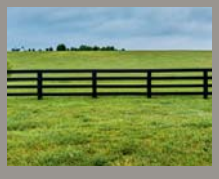
It's all about timing

One challenge many producers face when growing cover crops is how to achieve an adequate stand. This goes back to timely seeding regardless of cover crop species. Whether you

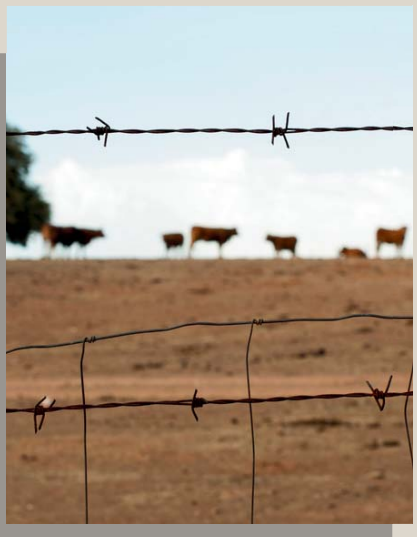
Did you know?

At least **three** grounding rods are needed for most electric fence chargers, while some larger fence chargers may require 5-6 rods. In addition, soil moisture is critical to ensure electric fence is properly grounded. Dry soil (<10% moisture) has high resistance, making it harder for the electrical current to return to the charger completing the circuit. This means a weaker charge or no shock available even with a strong fence charger.









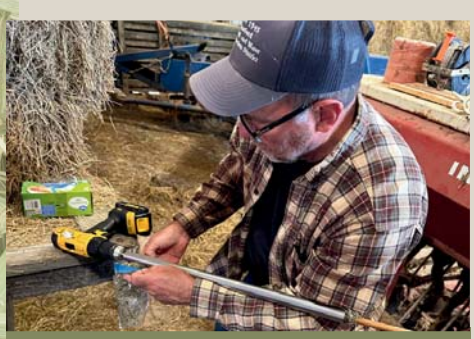
are drilling, broadcasting, or completing an aerial seeding. Thanks to modern technology, we now have the ability to be flexible with variable weather conditions, standing row crops, and other environmental factors, but you ***MUST*** get your seeding completed for successful germination. It's also important to note, if you broadcast or aerial seed, ensuring your rate is increased to account for poor seed-to-soil contact and lower germination efficiency.

Cover crops + brown gold = great things

So, how do cover crops and manure mix? In the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB), manure is a hot topic regarding phosphorus loads in the Waters of the State. Incorporating manure whenever possible within 24 hours and planting a cover crop is a great way to ensure you aren't leaving any nutrients on the surface to runoff and your manure investment is not going to waste without a growing crop present. Alternatively, surface application of manure onto a good standing cover crop with setback distances, as normally practiced, can serve as another measure to capture nutrients and improve soil health. Weather forecast, soil conditions, application setback distances, and neighbor relations should always be considered whenever manure application occurs regardless of time of year. Remember to always keep good records of cover crop seeding and manure application and retain copies of records for at least five years. For assistance selecting a cover crop to feed your soil biology, harnessing your manure application, or to maximize your livestock feed, contact the Crawford/Wyandot SWCD offices today!



Drill multiple samples of the same lot of hay



Place the composite hay sample in a plastic bag



Label the sample and send to your lab of choice for analysis!

Forage Testing Program

Making quality dry hay can be challenging for a multitude of reasons, which justifies the need for forage nutrient evaluation.

The goal of forage testing in any year is to know what nutritional value is available in forages or stored hay and what supplemental feedstuffs may be needed to provide livestock proper nutrition for winter feeding.

Three Things to Remember when Gathering a Forage Sample for Testing

1. **Obtain Multiple Samples** – If you have hay from different growing stages, cutting time frames, species, etc. **each requires its own individual sample** (i.e., sample #1: mixed cool-season grasses, 1st cutting of 2026 at Sam's place; sample #2: alfalfa, 2nd cutting from the back forty farm).

2. **Use a Forage Probe for Sample Collection** – In order to collect the best forage sample from a round or square bale, **use a forage probe to collect the sample,** ensuring you are collecting from all layers of the bale to its core.

3. **DO NOT Send Samples on Fridays/Federal Holidays** – Sending samples during these time periods means they may sit idle waiting to arrive at the lab, which can result in inaccurate results. Try to send your samples earlier in the week!

For more information about how to sample hay for testing, visit the Crawford SWCD Facebook page for an educational, how-to video!

Local Conservation Program Assistance Available

If you've noticed muddy pasture runs, have an excess of stockpiled manure that's running off, or if you've considered developing a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP) for your operation our office can help support the design, development, and implementation of those projects!







In a world full of problems, let conservation be the solution!

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) offers programs to producers and landowners in the county to address resource concerns and improve their operation. The SWCD offices support these programs by offering technical assistance to the applicant through means of project design and plan development.

Common Practices for Livestock Operations:

- **Waste Storage Facility (Manure Storage)**
- **Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP)**
  - Includes your livestock, soil tests, commerical fertilizer, etc.
- **Prescribed Grazing (Grazing Management Plan)**
  - For rotational grazing purposes to maximize acres and forage
- **Livestock Fence, Water Sources, and Water Pipeline**
- **Heavy Use Protection Areas (HUA) and Access Roads**

If you are interested in more information about technical assistance or additional conservation projects our offices work on, please contact the Crawford and Wyandot Soil and Water Conservation District offices!



Hannah Ziegler, Nutrient Management/Grazing Technician and Content Creator is your contact for ***ALL*** things livestock!

Enrollment is open ***NOW*** for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)!











Feeding Forage:
Wasting Hay is a Waste of Your Time

The average price of off-road diesel has been teetering at nearly $6.00 a gallon and the average cost of round-baled, grass hay in Ohio is holding steady at $170 per ton. Farmer sentiments are low across the industry with increased input costs; so for now, it's about focusing on what you can control when it comes to your operation.

The culprits of hay waste

Often times the leading causes of lost/wasted hay are from spoilage as a result of improper storage and from hay lost at the feeder. While there are numerous ways to feed hay, each garners their own advantages and pitfalls. During the fall and winter months we see the majority of hay being fed either on sacrifice lots/paddocks, heavy use protection areas (HUA), or under roof.

So the hay feeder *DOES m*atter?

A hay feeder is a hay feeder is a hay feeder, right? Wrong. There are many different types of hay feeders utilized on large and small ruminant operations such as hay rings with or without animal access panels, cradle feeders, feeder wagons, and cone feeders. Each serve their own purpose and can affect an operation and the consumption of hay by livestock differently. According to the University of Wisconsin-Madison research, there are two specific feeders that increase hay waste. Hay rings allowing animal access (i.e. rings where younger livestock can make entry) and feeder wagons are two of the leading hay feeders for hay loss with a combined 31.5% average loss (2020). The two main reasons the loss is high is due to animal entry (manure, urine, and trampling decrease palatability and ease of eating) and livestock not consuming all of the forage they grab but rather dropping it on the ground.

It's affecting your bottom line

It's daunting to think that if you are utilizing either of the aforementioned hay feeders you could be losing over 30% of your total hay inventory per year. To put that into perspective, let's look at a scenario and do some simple math:

Farmer Joe buys 150, 1000lb. round bales of mixed grass hay for the 2026-2027 hay feeding season. He has a feeder wagon for his cows and a hay ring for his weaned calves.

2,000 lbs. or 1 Ton of hay = $170.00 per Ton
1,000 lb. round bale = $85.00
$85.00 x 150 bales = $12,750 total cost in hay
$12,750 x 31.5% combined hay feeder loss

$4,016 possible hay inventory loss for 2026-2027 season

Prices are going down and fuel is continuing to go up, but a simple change to an area in your operation experiencing year-over-year hay loss is something simple you can control. Now that's a lot of hay, literally!



Winter Manure Application

It may be tempting to haul manure in the winter, but it's best to leave the tractor and manure spreader parked as seen above! Make plans to haul yet this fall, or stockpile your manure in a manure storage structure or on the edge of a field; this simple measure protects your operation and the wildlife downstream!

Do *NOT* apply manure if

- **Soils are frozen or snow-covered**
  - *Unless a growing cover crop is present*
- **The top two inches of soil are saturated**
- **There is greater than 50% chance of rainfall of more than 0.5" within 24 hours of application of manure.**
- **Additionally, do not apply commercial fertilizer when there is a greater than 50% chance of rainfall of more than 1" within 12 hours of the application.**

All rules are based off the USDA-NRCS 590 Nutrient Management standard and are in place for anyone residing in the Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB) to protect water quality through the wise use of on-farm and commercial nutrients. For questions about manure application, please contact Nutrient Management Technician, Hannah Ziegler.



Liquid manure application on snow covered and saturated ground from freezing and thawing.



High-rate penpack manure application on snow covered ground ***without*** a growing crop present.

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If you would like to receive this newsletter in electronic format, please contact Hannah Ziegler.

Serving the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Crawford and Wyandot Counties.

Crawford and Wyandot Soil and Water Conservation Districts Presents

SCARED YET?

You should be...

Save the Date for the 2027 Winter Manure Meeting

Managing manure spills can be scary! Our SWCD offices are here to help you navigate the good, bad, and downright ugly when it comes to manure application, storage, and handling spills and errors. Join us for our annual program discussing all things manure and best management practices. Thanks to the ongoing support of our affiliate members and sponsors this program is being offered **FREE** of charge again for 2027!

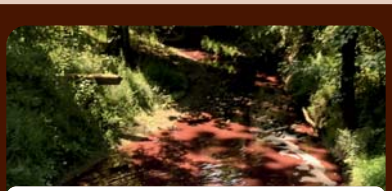
Date & Time: Thursday, February 25, 2027, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.
(5:30 – Catered Meal, 6:30 – Program Begins)

Location: Wyandot County EMS Building
401 North Warpole Street, Upper Sandusky, OH 43351

Formal invitation and additional information to follow on the Crawford and Wyandot Soil and Water Conservation Districts websites and Facebook pages!


Slurry Manure in a Ditch


Full Liquid Manure Lagoon


Anerobic Manure in a Creek