

SARE/CTIC COVER CROP SURVEY

Cover crops offer a wide range of benefits to farmers, from erosion control to soil building to capturing nutrients and holding them in the root zone over the winter. As interest in cover crops continues to grow, it's important to understand the trends, opportunities and challenges surrounding these important tools. Insight from farmers who use cover crops—or from those who haven't yet made the move—is vital for fellow farmers, as well as for crop advisors, conservation specialists and policymakers.



PROJECT SUMMARY

Over the past several years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) and CTIC have teamed up on the most comprehensive surveys on cover crop management in the country.

Information gained from the cover crop survey has helped us better understand cover crops and how they are being used by farmers across the U.S. The survey information provided focus on cover crop research, demonstration projects and incentive programs. Education and outreach strategies have also helped shape regulations that affect cover crop management.

The 2013 survey was cited by USDA NRCS chief Jason Weller in testimony on Capitol Hill, and our 2014 survey was referenced in *The New York Times* in February, 2016.

Please visit <http://www.ctic.org/Cover Crops> for past survey results.



PAST RESULTS

Previous years' cover crop surveys have shed light on key issues and concerns facing farmers who grow cover crops or are considering the practice, as well as the impacts of cover crops on cash crop yields.

2012 - 2013

Roughly 750 farmers from across the U.S. completed the survey, representing hundreds of thousands of acres of cover crops—drawing on cover cropping experience that goes back as far as 1948. The challenging 2012 crop year, during which drought pushed national yield averages down by 26 percent for corn and 8.1 percent for soybeans, highlighted some of the positive impacts of cover crops. Fields that had cover crops prior to the 2012 cash crop season yielded an average yield increase of 11.1 bushels of corn and 4.9 bushels of soybeans vs. comparable fields that had not been planted to cover crops—a 9 percent bump for corn and 10 percent advantage in soybeans.

2013 - 2014

More than 1,900 farmers completed the survey and 639 of the respondents provided data comparing corn yields on similar fields with and without cover crops. They noted an average yield increase of five bushels per acre, or 3.1 percent, on fields that had been planted to cover crops before corn. Comparing yields in soybeans, 583 farmers reported an average boost of two bushels per acre, or 4.3 percent, following cover crops. Surprisingly, 63 percent of the cover crop users said they had never received cost-share assistance or payments to grow cover crops.

2014 - 2015

A survey of more than 1,200 farmers across the country revealed that cover crops boosted corn yields last year by a mean of 3.66 bushels per acre (2.1%) and increased soybeans by an average of 2.19 bushels per acre (4.2%)—the third year in a row showing a yield increase following cover crops. Acreage of cover crops also continues to climb steadily higher. The total reported acreage of cover crops planted by surveyed farmers in 2014 was 20% higher than in 2013, despite lower commodity prices.

To see past survey reports, visit www.ctic.org/Cover Crops.

And for loads of information on cover crops—including research, farmer insight and tools for selecting the most appropriate cover crops for your situation—visit www.ctic.org.



Photos courtesy of USDA NRCS, Paul Gross, and CTIC

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