



**Conservation Technology
Information Center**



**american
seed trade
association**

NATIONAL COVER CROP SURVEY REPORT

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORS



MARCH 2025

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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2024, the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, and American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) developed and distributed an online survey geared toward agricultural advisors—the Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), crop scouts, employees of federal and state conservation agencies and local soil and water conservation districts, and other trusted advisors farmers rely on for insight into cover crops and other management practices.

This is the eighth Cover Crop Survey Report in a series that dates back to 2012. Previous surveys focused on farmers' attitudes and influences; this is the first of the group that digs into the perspectives of the influencers, their sources of information, and how they are influenced by their own experience or what they have learned from others.

The 2024-2025 CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey was conducted via a 41-question online survey in October of 2024, and elicited 686 validated responses. Of those 686, 654 identified themselves as farm advisors and completed the survey. Respondents hailed from 47 U.S. states and represented a wide range of advising functions. Remarkably, 77.5% of the participants who said they directly advise growers were Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), an audience particularly targeted for participation in the survey.

The group was split almost evenly between consultants who also farm and their counterparts who are non-farmers—45.8% of the respondents reported that they farm, while 54.2% said they don't. Seven out of 10 of the advisors who farm use cover crops themselves, a trait that correlated with higher proportions of their clients using cover crops and more enthusiastic advocacy of the practice.



7 OUT OF 10 OF THE ADVISORS WHO FARM USE COVER CROPS THEMSELVES

Some of the findings in the current survey echo data from previous surveys of farmers in the CTIC/SARE/ASTA series. For instance, reducing soil erosion was a key motivation for farmers' adoption of cover crops (selected by 24.2% of the advisors), as was improving soil health, identified by 19.4%. When advisors were asked about the portion of farmers who stop using cover crops, economic concerns were foremost, led by a perceived lack of measurable return (31.2%) and time and labor requirements (20.2%).

ABSTRACT CONT'D

However, in a notable difference from previous farmer surveys, receiving an incentive payment was much more important to the clients of advisors in this year's survey—it was farmers' number two motivation for trying cover crops, according to advisors. Previous CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Surveys had a high proportion of farmer participants with long cover crop experience, making them Early Adopters on the famous adoption curve developed by Rodgers (1962). In the 2022-2023 CTIC/SARE/ASTA survey, two out of three participants said they had never received an incentive payment. It is possible that as the growers farther down the adoption curve decide whether to try cover crops, incentives may be more compelling than they have been in the past.

One-on-one contact with farmers is, by a huge margin, the most common connection between advisors and their farmer clients. One-on-one conversations on the farm were the most common form of contact, practiced by 84.2% of the respondents. Half (53.8%) meet farmers one-on-one in an office, and 27.9% meet one-on-one virtually. Presentations to groups of farmers are conducted by 43.7%; the same number provide educational or technical materials to farmers.

In those meetings, presentations, and materials, most advisors emphasize the role of cover crops in improving soil health (65.4%) and reducing erosion (59.0%). Improving soil structure is another popular message from advisors, selected by 33.6%, followed by better water infiltration (29.9%).

Advisors themselves learn about cover crops in a variety of ways. By far, the largest portion of advisors—72.2%—said they initially learned about cover crops on the job. The second-ranked source of initial cover crop knowledge was information from farmers (48.5%), followed closely by their own farm background (46.3%). Future training opportunities are likely to be a combination of virtual and in-person sessions, according to advisor preferences. Sharing information on cover crops with clients is led by field days (noted by 55.2%), followed very closely by sharing articles and videos (54.3%), promoting or managing farmer peer networks (34.6%), newsletters (26.3%), social media (23.1%), and webinars (18.5%). Stakeholders with data or insights on cover crops would be wise to develop materials that fit those channels.

Their messages are likely to fall on fertile soil. Advisors reported that their clients are moderately interested (50.2%) or very interested (8.6%) in cover crops, and more than half of the advisors (56.9%) expect to see cover crop acres grow in the coming years. With an educated, motivated, connected community of advisors helping share insights on cover crops with many of their clients, farmers across the country have a strong support system to help them succeed.



FOREWORD

The 2024-2025 National Cover Crop Survey from CTIC, SARE, and ASTA takes an important and exciting turn to look at a key constituency in the chain of information reaching growers: trusted advisors. At CTIC, we have more than 40 years of experience connecting farmers, researchers, policy makers, conservation officials, agribusiness leaders, and others in an effort to support conservation practices across the landscape. Advisors—including crop consultants, agribusiness specialists, agency staff, conservation district partners, and more—can be invaluable partners in better understanding cover crops, as well as more effectively communicating where they fit and how farmers can make them work in their individual operations.

The advisors who participated in this year's survey are generally an experienced group. Four in 10 have been advising growers for more than 11 years, and more than 75% of those that directly advise farmers are Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), a huge tribute to the strength of the American Society of Agronomy's outstanding education and certification program.

In fact, advisors are as eager for information on cover crops as are the farmers they serve. A major finding of this year's survey is that most advisors have been learning about cover crops on the job and are eager for more training and insight into the quickly evolving science of making them work. We also learned that seeing is believing—advisors who grow cover crops on their own farms are less likely to defer questions about cover crops to other sources and more likely to be stronger advocates for the practice. We can't tell from this data whether they produce and promote cover crops because the practice is particularly well-suited to where they operate, or because they have figured out how to make them work wherever they are based, but we can see a connection between doing and teaching. That's exciting.

We also see that many advisors operate in parallel, some helping growers with agronomic advice in the field, others helping by working with farmers on incentive programs or management plans. Sometimes those parallel tracks become silos, and some of the comments we received in this year's survey indicate that policies and programs don't always align with what works in the field. Perhaps this survey will encourage advisors with different backgrounds and roles to intersect and share their perspectives with each other. They could team up as mentors to one other, bridging gaps and breaking holes in their silos.

We are deeply excited about this year's National Cover Crop Survey, and look forward to further research on trends among farmers as well as the advisors who serve them. CTIC is also engaged in other work on cover crops, from tracking acreage trends through satellite imagery with the Operational Tillage Information System (OpTIS) to helping enroll acreage in the Farmers for Soil Health program, facilitating incentive program discovery with the Conservation Connector web app, and more.

Together—with the nation's dedicated community of advisors—we will use the insights from this survey to help make cover crops an even more valuable, successful tool for farmers on millions more acres across the country.



RYAN HEINIGER

Executive Director

Conservation Technology Information Center

INTRODUCTION

Farming is an increasingly complex business, from the science of production to the high-stakes economic decisions required to sustain agricultural operations. Like most sophisticated companies that assemble advisory boards and build relationships with specialists such as auditors and attorneys, farmers rely on the knowledge and perspective offered by experts.



Advisors are a key factor in many farmers' choices on a wide range of management practices. Trusted crop consultants guide management decisions on millions of acres. Representatives of farm management firms and banks provide perspective to non-operating landowners. U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Services Agency (FSA), and conservation district staff members provide technical support and vital connections to grants, cost-share programs, and other incentives. Particularly as cover crops become more common among the Early Majority and Late Majority farmers in Rogers' famous bell-shaped adoption curve, advisors will presumably have even greater influence than they did on the Innovators and Early Adopters who have driven cover crop planting in past years.

For instance, in the 2023 CTIC/SARE/ASTA Cover Crop Survey of farmers, the top three resources that cover crop non-users said would be most helpful in encouraging their adoption of cover crops related directly to the advisors listed above. Nearly half (43.8%) said information on economic return would be very helpful, while an additional 17.4% said it would be moderately helpful. Cost-share or incentives were listed as extremely helpful by 39.6% and moderately helpful by 19.4%; one-on-one technical assistance garnered 29.2% extremely helpful and 18.1% moderately helpful.

In the 2016 survey, 22% of cover crop users said they planted a custom mix of cover crop seed designed by their crop consultant or cover crop seed salesman.

The trust farmers place in their advisors inspired the 2024-2025 CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey. With insight into the attitudes and perspectives of these experts, and a look at how they source and share information on cover crops, the goal of this survey is to help stakeholders provide advisors with the data and tools they need to help their farmer clients achieve the benefits cover crops can provide.





METHOD

The eighth CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey was conducted from October 1 through October 31, 2024 via an online Qualtrics instrument. The survey was designed by a committee representing CTIC, SARE, and ASTA and included yes/no, multiple choice, and fill-in answers. In addition to financial support from SARE and ASTA, the project received funding from the American Soybean Association. All answers were confidential, and answering most questions was not required to move forward. Respondents who reached the end of the survey could enter their email for an optional drawing of one of two VISA gift cards. Drawing entrants' emails and identities were not linked to their answers.

CTIC, SARE and ASTA publicized the survey with a press release, emails, social media links, and newsletter articles in their own organs as well as through partners such as the Soil and Water Conservation Society newsletter. In addition, the team sent two email blasts to Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) through the American Society of Agronomy, which certifies CCAs. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) also included an article about the survey, and a link to the instrument, in its newsletter. Lessiter Media, publishers of *No-Till Farmer*, *Cover Crop Strategies*, *Precision Farming Dealer* and more, also carried articles on the survey.

The survey instrument contained 41 questions in total. Advisors in private industry—not federal or state agencies or soil and water conservation districts—who reported that they recommend cover crops to at least some clients were exposed to all 41. Advisors who said they did not recommend cover crops to the growers with whom they worked followed a path of 34 questions. Respondents who were not consultants were led immediately to a thank-you message at the conclusion of the survey.

A total of 686 valid responses were recorded. Of them, 32 individuals answered “I am not a farm advisor,” leaving 654 advisors as the respondent pool for the rest of the survey.



METHOD CONT'D

Respondents who reported an advisory role were asked whether they also farm, whether they plant or have planted cover crops on their own farms, and whether they recommend cover crops to all or some of their clients. Branching questions for those that also farmed part-time and for those who did or didn't recommend cover crops allowed deeper exploration of their position. Further questions explored perceived opportunities and barriers to cover crop adoption, key questions growers ask, and where the advisors received cover crop information themselves.

Because respondents followed different paths and not every respondent answered every question, the number of respondents differed from question to question. The total number of answers (n) is defined for each question.

Bethany Bedeker of the University of Missouri coordinated the survey instrument design and implementation, fine-tuned the wording, collected and validated the responses, and analyzed the data. This project is a direct result of her diligent work and dedication.

More information on this survey is available at https://www.ctic.org/data/Cover_Crops_Research_and_Demonstration_Cover_Crop_Survey

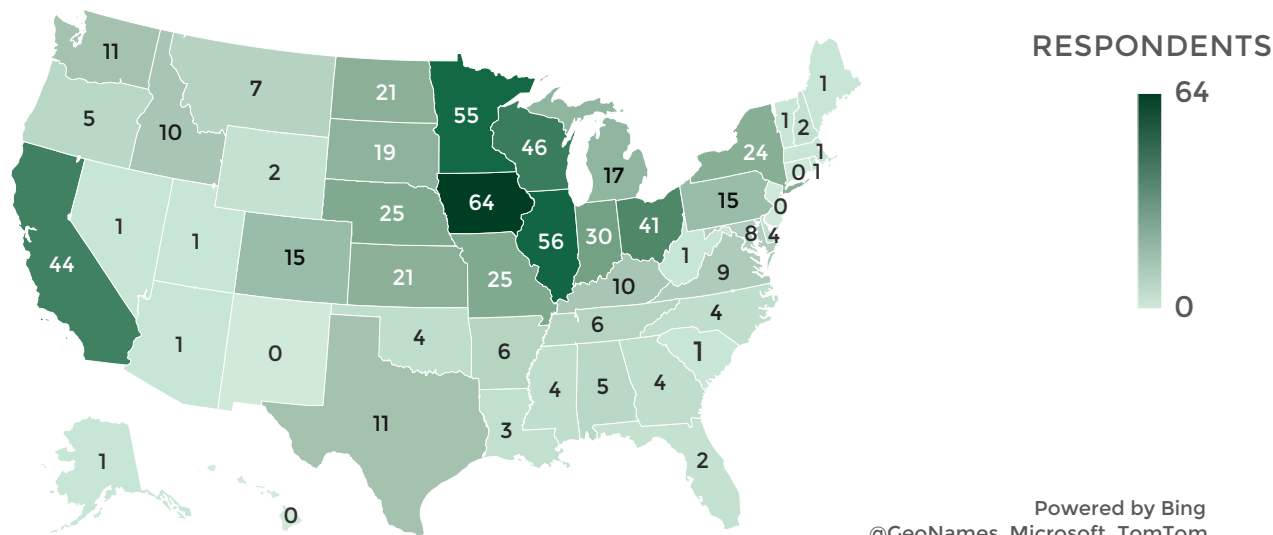


RESPONDENTS

- LOCATION -

The 646 respondents to the survey represented 46 U.S. states. Top states in representation included Iowa (64, or 9.9%), Illinois (56/8.6%), Minnesota (55/8.5%), Wisconsin (46/7.1%), and California (44/6.8%). No respondents participated from Connecticut, Hawaii, New Jersey, or New Mexico. One respondent reported living outside the United States.

LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS



n=646

- TYPES OF ADVISORS -

Nearly 8 in 10—508 of 653, or 77.5%— of the respondents who advised farmers were Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), a rigorous program of the American Society of Agronomy that requires advisors to pass a challenging certification test and maintain a schedule of continuing education to keep their credentials current.

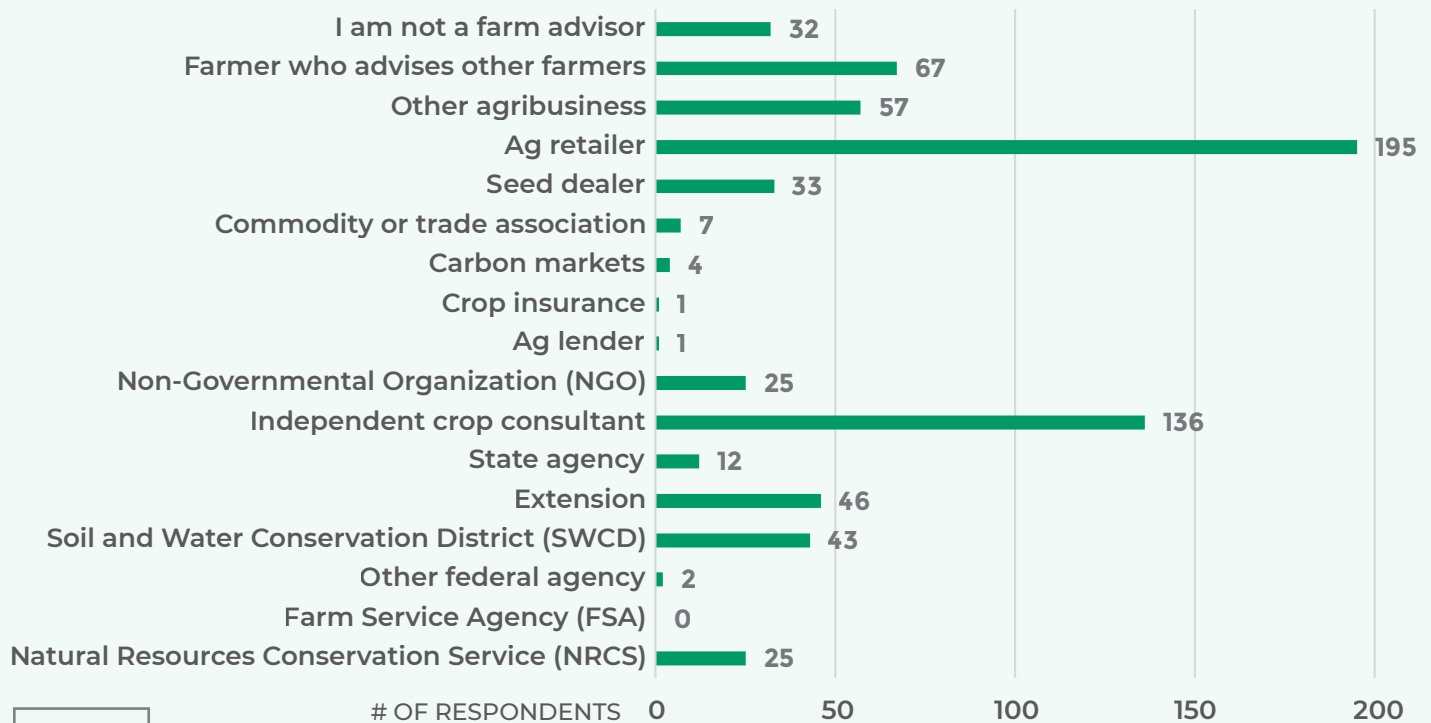
The largest proportion of respondents (195 of 686, or 28.4%) worked in ag retail, while the second-largest contingent (136, or 19.8%) identified themselves as independent crop consultants. Sixty-seven (9.7%) described themselves as “a farmer who advises other farmers,” while 57 (8.3%) selected “other agribusiness.”

Agency perspectives were also represented in the sample. Forty-six (6.7%) respondents worked in Extension, 43 (6.3%) for soil and water conservation districts, 25 (3.6%) for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2 (0.3%) for another federal agency, and 12 (1.7%) for a state agency.

Other advisors described themselves as seed dealers (33, or 4.8%), worked for non-governmental organizations (25, or 3.6%), commodity or trade associations (7/1%), carbon markets (4, or 0.5%), crop insurance (1), and ag lenders (1). Thirty-two (4.7%) said they were not farm advisors and were guided immediately to the end of the survey.

Of 649 respondents, 80 (12.3%) reported that their advising role was connected to a Climate-Smart Commodities project.

HOW WOULD YOU BEST CATEGORIZE YOUR ROLE AS A FARM ADVISOR?



n=686

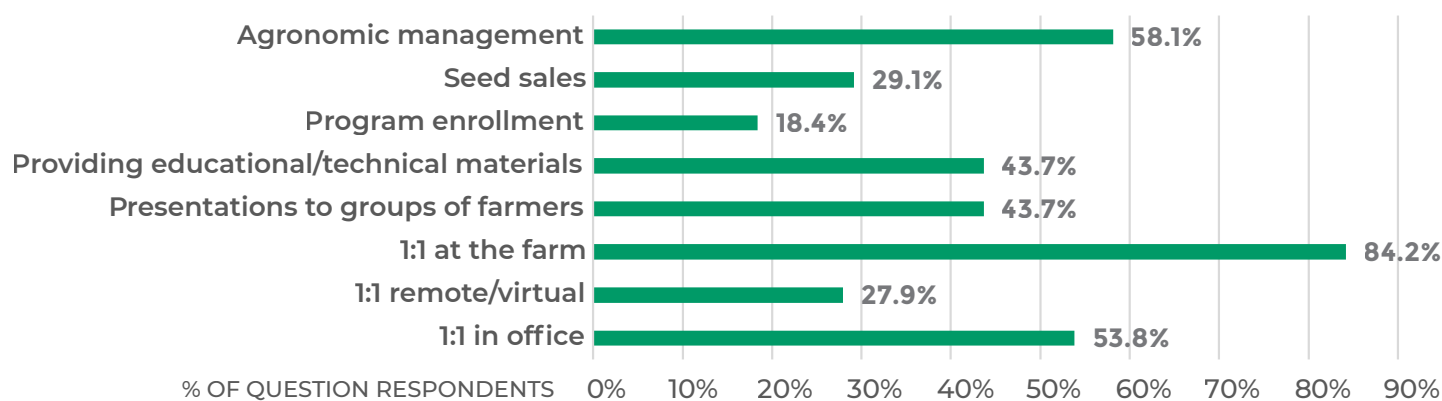


Understanding how advisors share their knowledge of cover crops with their clients can help policymakers, suppliers, and others more effectively create tools to help the advisors communicate accurately and effectively.

Of 652 respondents who could select more than one answer to the question, “In what specific ways are you interacting with farmers to provide advice?” the vast majority—549 advisors, or 84.2%—communicate one-to-one with farmers at the farm. One-on-one meetings in the office were practiced by 351 advisors (53.8%) and one-on-one remote/virtual contact was identified by 182 respondents (27.9%), while presentations to groups of farmers were conducted by 285 (43.7%). The same number (285/43.7%) provided educational or technical materials to farmers.

The role of advisors connected to crop protection, seed, or programs was seen strongly here. Agronomic management reflected an important type of interaction with growers for 379 advisors (58.1%), followed by seed sales with 190 responses (29.1%), and program enrollment (120, or 18.4%).

IN WHAT SPECIFIC WAYS ARE YOU INTERACTING WITH FARMERS TO PROVIDE ADVICE? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



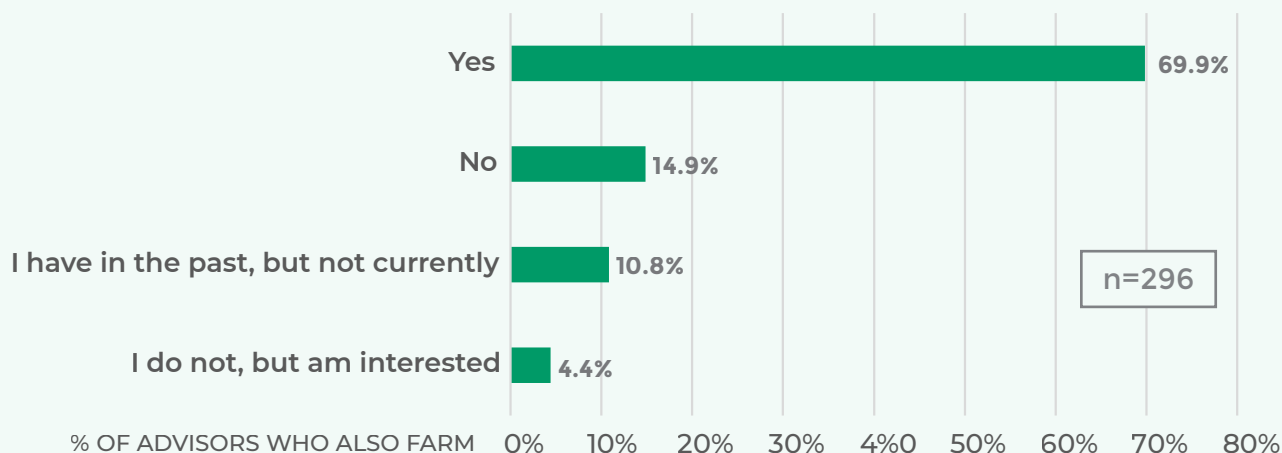
n=652

- ADVISORS' FARMING ACTIVITY -

All but one of the advisors answered a question on whether they farm in addition to their work as an advisor—54.2%, or 354 of the 653 respondents, did not farm, while 45.8%, or 299 respondents, did.

Of the 296 farming respondents who answered a question about their use of cover crops on their own operations, 207 (69.9%) said they did, and 32 (10.8%) said they had in the past, but did not currently use cover crops. Forty-four farming advisors (14.9%) reported that they did not use cover crops, while 13 (4.4%) said they did not currently use cover crops but were interested in them.

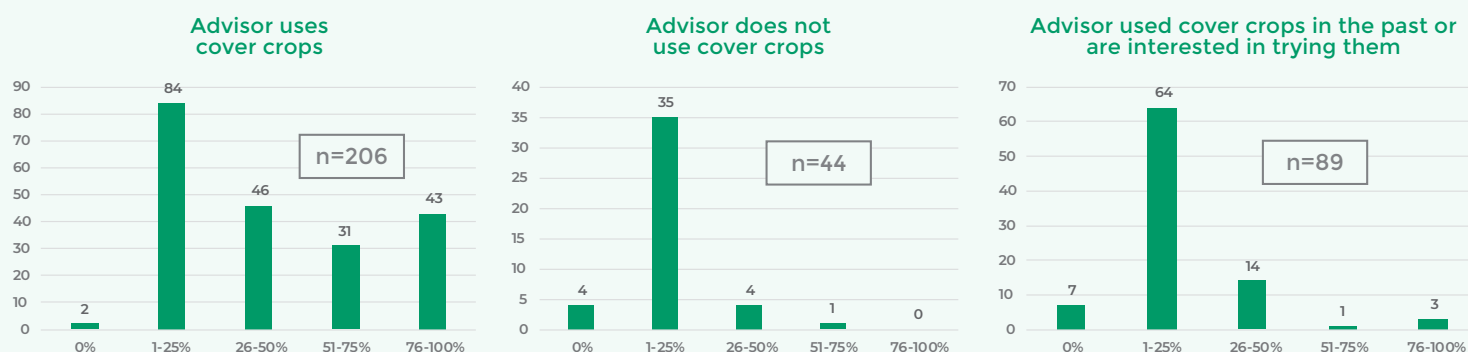
DO YOU USE COVER CROPS ON YOUR FARM?



The survey team cross-tabulated data on whether advisors used cover crops on their own farms with the percentage of their farmer clients who use cover crops themselves. The intent was to see if a relationship might exist between an advisor's personal experience and their success in inspiring clients to use cover crops. Among the 206 advisors who use cover crops on their own farms, there was a substantially higher proportion of clients using cover crops—22.3% reported 25 to 50% of their clients using covers, compared to 9.1% at the same level of adoption among clients of advisors who did not use cover crops themselves. Fifteen percent of cover crop users had 51 to 75% of their clientele using cover crops, vs. 2.2% of non-user advisors, and **a striking 20.9% of the cover crop users reported 76 to 100% of their clients also using cover crops, compared to none of the non-user advisors.** Just 1% of the cover crop users had no clients using cover crops, compared to 9% of non-user advisors.

The 89 advisors reporting that they did not use cover crops themselves but used them in the past or are interested in trying them took a middle ground, with 7.9% reporting no cover crops among their clients, 71.9% with 1 to 25% cover crop users, 15.7% in the 26-to-50% category, 1.1% reporting 51 to 75% cover crop usage, and 3.4% with 76 to 100% cover crop usage among their clientele.

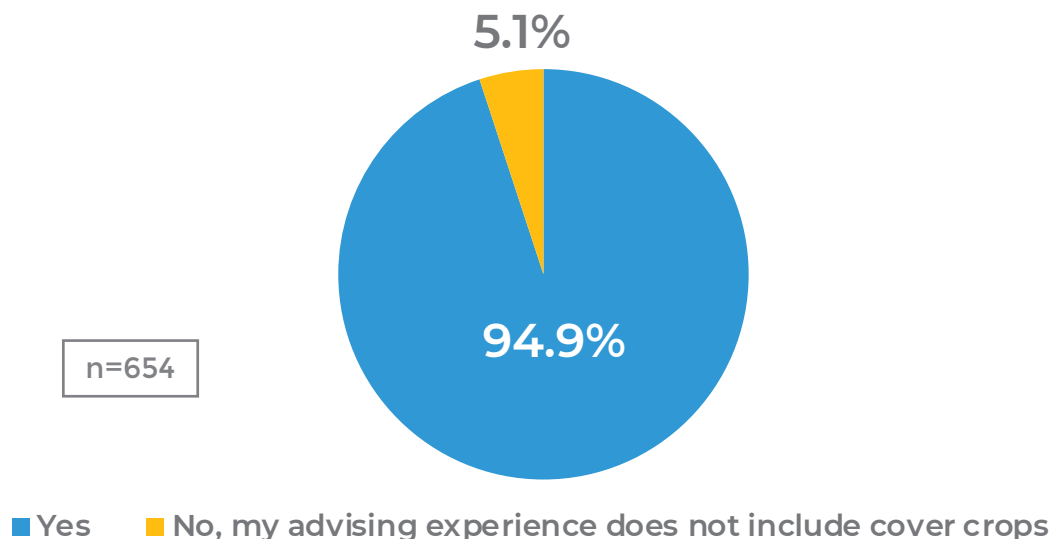
It is important to note that these correlations could indicate that advisors' personal experience with cover crops is somewhat contagious, but they could also reflect an effect of local conditions that favor the success or popularity of cover crops.

CORRELATION BETWEEN ADVISORS' USE OF COVER CROPS
AND CLIENTS' USE OF THE PRACTICE

ADVISING ON COVER CROPS

Among respondents to the survey, 621 of 654 respondents (94.9%) said they advise farmers on cover crops. Just 5.1% (33 respondents) said their advising experience does not include cover crops. Those 33 respondents followed a path for non-users. Their answers are included later in the report.

DO YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE ADVISING FARMERS ON COVER CROPS IN SOME CAPACITY?

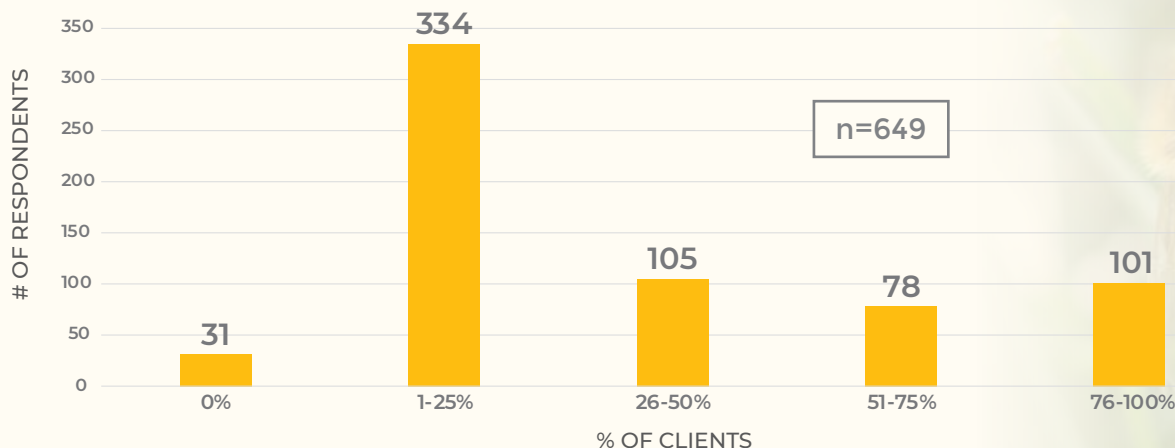


- *SELECTIVE ADVICE* -

Most advisors participating in the survey responded that they worked with some but not all of their clients on cover crops; the proportion of their clients using cover crops varied quite a bit.

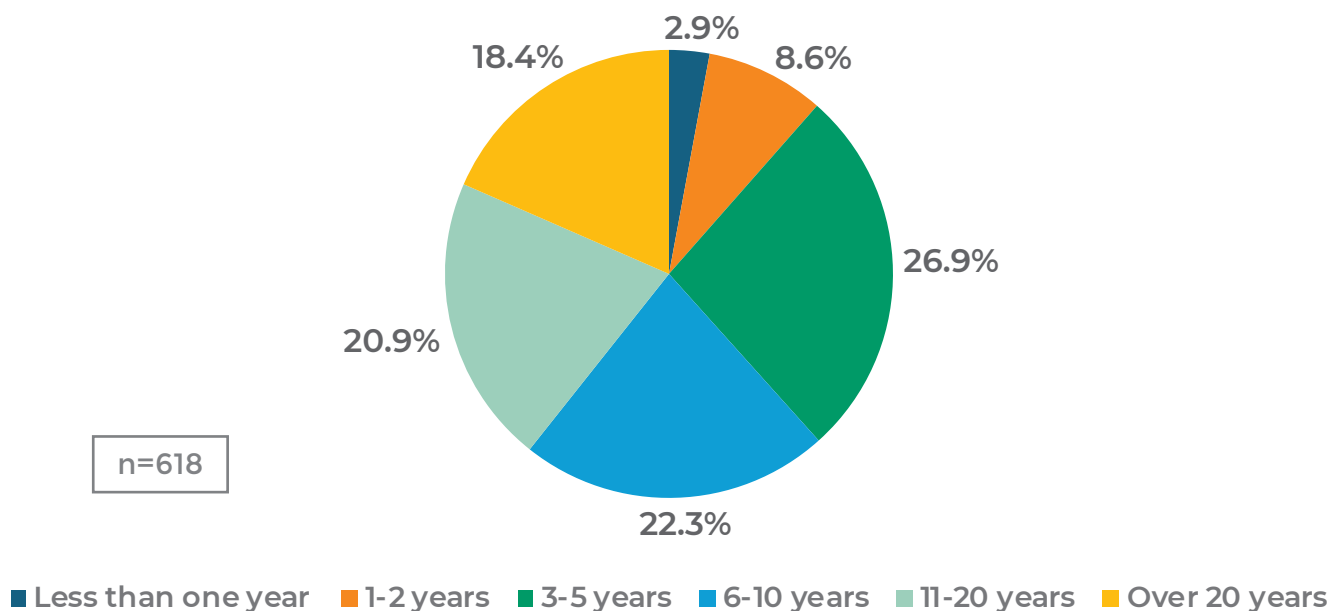
Half of the 649 respondents (334, or 51.5%) who reported on the proportion of farmer clients they advised on cover crops said they guided 1 to 25% of their clientele on covers. Reaching 26 to 50% of their growers with cover crop advice were 105 respondents (16.2%), while 78 (12.0%) advised 51 to 75% of their clients on cover crops, 101 (15.6%) advised 76 to 100%, and just 31 (4.8%) reported that they did not advise any of their clients on cover crops.

WHAT PERCENT OF YOUR TOTAL FARMER CLIENTS DO YOU ADVISE ON USING COVER CROPS?



Nearly 9 out of 10 of the advisors participating in the survey (547 of 618, or 88.5%) had been advising farmers on using cover crops for 3 years or more. The largest number, 166 (26.9%), fell into the 3-to-5-year category, followed by 138 (22.3%) reporting 6 to 10 years of cover crop advising experience, 129 (20.9%) with 11 to 20 years, and 114 (18.4%) with more than 20 years of advising on cover crops. Fifty-three (8.6%) had 1 to 2 years of cover crop advising experience, while just 18 (2.9%) reported less than 1 year of experience in advising on cover crops.

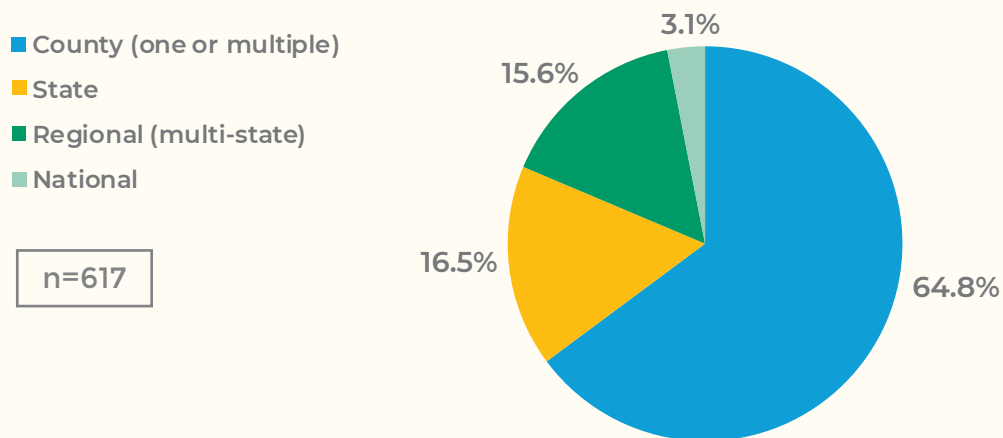
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ADVISING FARMERS ON USING COVER CROPS?



- SCOPE AND REACH -

Of 617 advisors that reported advising on cover crops and answered the question, "At what scale do you advise farmers on cover crops?" 400 (64.8%) reported advising on the county level, including one or more counties. At the state level, 102 respondents (16.5%) advised farmers on cover crops, while a very similar number—96, or (15.6%)—operate on a regional or multi-state level. Nineteen respondents (3.1%) advised nationally.

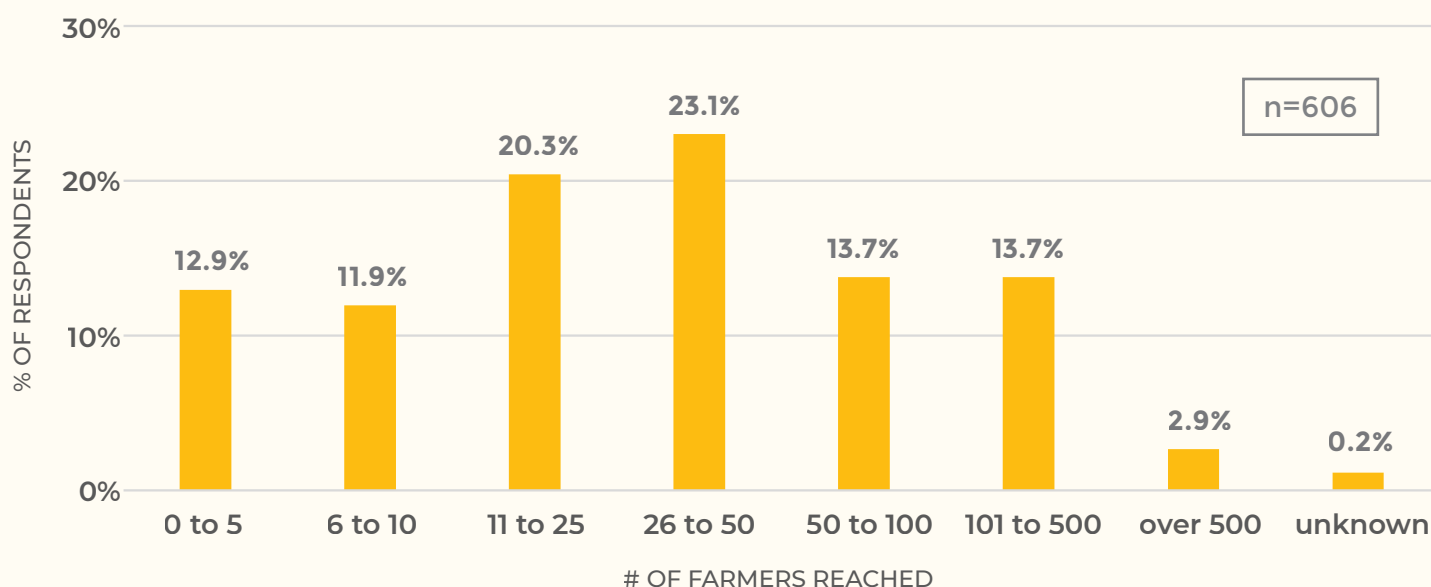
AT WHAT SCALE DO YOU ADVISE FARMERS ON COVER CROPS?



The reach of the advisors participating in the survey was quite extensive. Asked to quantify the number of farmers and acreage they reached in their advisory roles, 612 respondents replied—some with specific numbers and others with a range. The survey team grouped all answers into ranges, and disqualified six responses that seemed unusually high (e.g.: 10,000 farmers) without a correspondingly high number of acres.

The largest number of advisors (144 of 606, or 23.1%) reported reaching 26 to 50 farmers. That figure was followed by 123 (20.3%) who reached 11 to 25 growers. The next two ranges tied for number of consultants and both represented the larger side of the range, with 83 respondents (13.7%) reaching 50 to 100 and 101 to 500 growers. The top category, over 500 growers, reflected 16 answers (2.9%), while the lowest ranges garnered 78 participants (12.9%) for 0 to 5 farmers reached and 72 (11.9%) for 6 to 10. Seven respondents (0.2%) said they did not know how many farmers they reached.

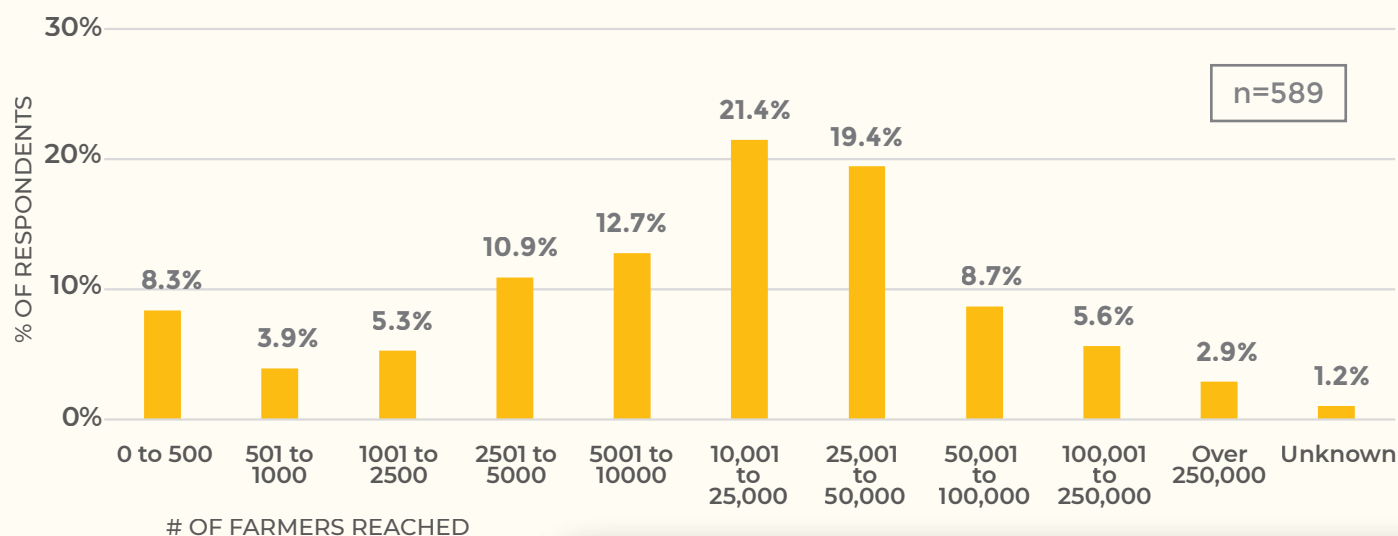
NUMBER OF FARMERS REACHED ANNUALLY IN DIRECT CONSULTING



Reported reach by acreage yielded impressive statistics and a very smooth bell curve. The largest category was 10,001 to 25,000 acres, selected by 126 of 589 advisors (21.4%), followed closely by the 25,001-to-50,000-acre range with 114 respondents (19.4%). Heading to the lower end, answers stair-stepped down to 5,001 to 10,000 acres (75/12.7%), 2,501 to 5,000 acres (64/10.9%), 1,001 to 2,500 acres (31/5.3%), and 501 to 1,000 (23/39.0%) before jumping to 49 respondents (8.3%) reporting an influence on 0 to 500 acres.

The larger acreage range was smaller but substantial. Like the lower acreage values, the pattern carried on the classic bell curve shape, with 51 (8.7%) touching 50,001 to 100,000 acres, 33 (5.6%) advising on 100,001 to 250,000 acres, and 17 (2.9%) reaching over 25,000 acres. Seven (1.2%) said they did not know how many acres they reached directly.

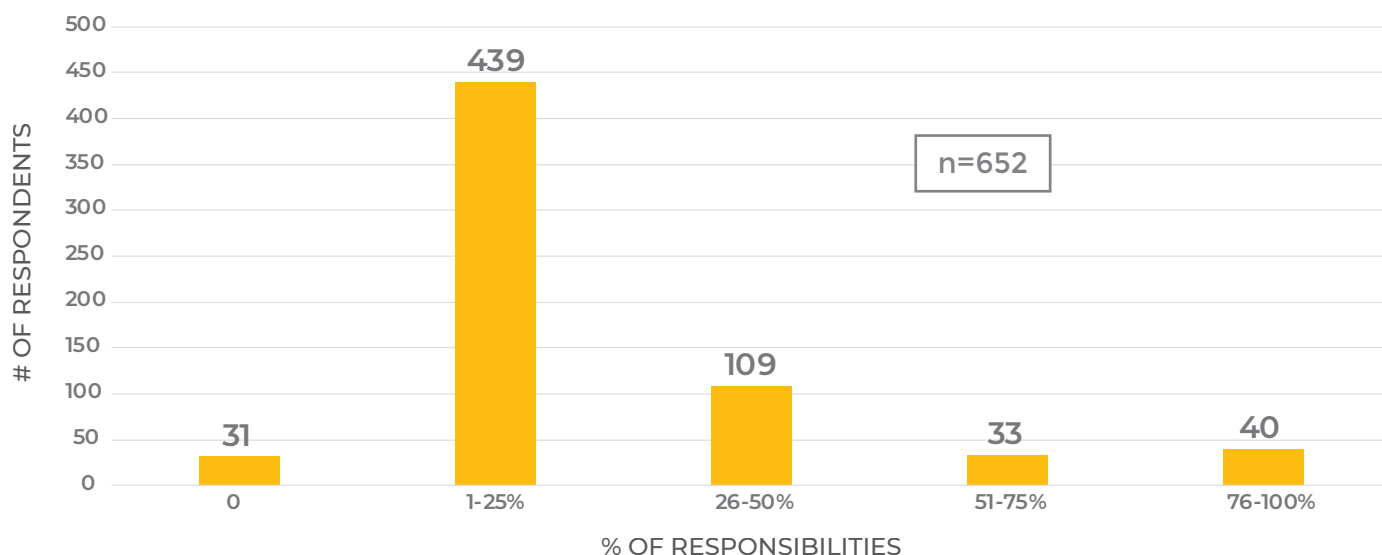
NUMBER OF ACRES REACHED ANNUALLY IN DIRECT CONSULTING



- **PART OF A LARGER PORTFOLIO** -

Cover crops are a relatively minor component of most participating advisors' portfolios. The vast majority—439 of 652, or 67.3%—of respondents said cover crops represent 1 to 25% of their current responsibilities. The next-highest segment, 109 (16.7%), placed cover crops at 26 to 50% of their responsibilities, and 40 (6.1%) indicated that they specialized in cover crops by noting that cover crops were 76 to 100% of their load. Roughly equal numbers said cover crops were 51 to 75% of their consulting responsibilities (33/5.1%) and zero percent (31/4.8%). It is worth keeping in mind that a typical crop consultant usually advises farmers on several management factors, including fertility, weeds, disease, and insects, and may give advice on seed selection, irrigation, tillage, crop rotation, and other factors, so it is not surprising that cover crops are just a portion of their advising emphasis.

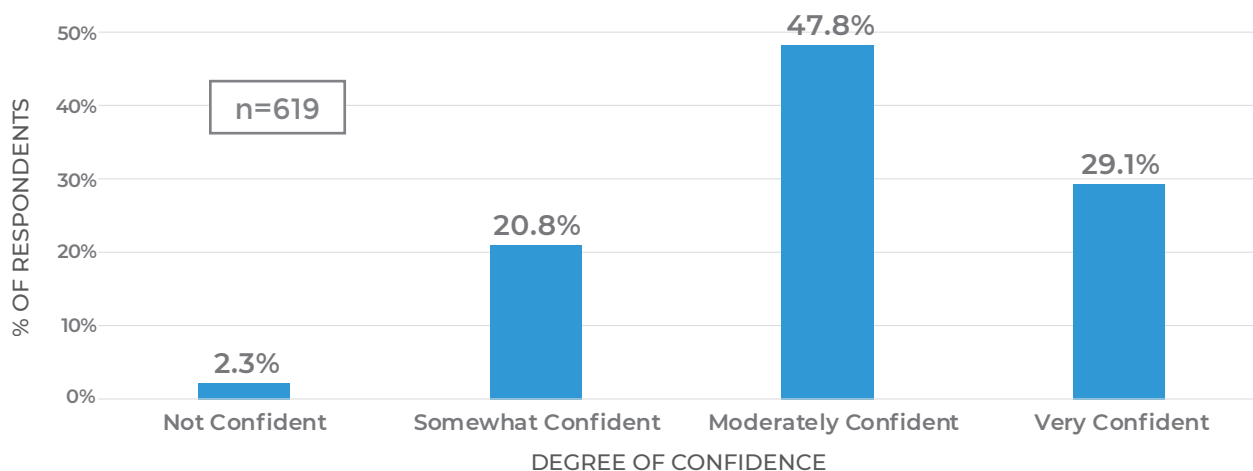
HOW MUCH OF YOUR CURRENT RESPONSIBILITIES INVOLVE COVER CROPS?



CONFIDENCE

Respondents who reported advising farmers on cover crops were asked how confident they were in making detailed and comprehensive recommendations on cover crops. Nearly half—296 of 619, or 47.8%—selected “moderately confident,” the third-highest of four options. The next-highest number, 180 (29.1%) selected the highest level, “very confident,” while 129 (20.8%) chose “somewhat confident” and 14 (2.3%) said they were “not confident.”

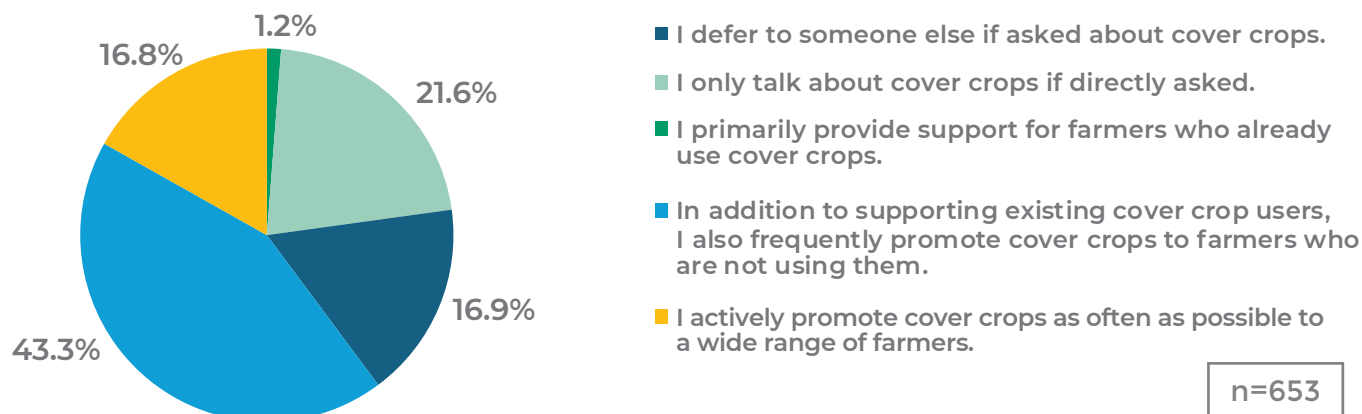
DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE MAKING DETAILED AND COMPREHENSIVE RECOMMENDATIONS ON COVER CROPS



The majority of advisors participating in the survey actively engage both cover crop users and non-users with information about cover crops—283 of 653, or 43.3% agreed with the statement, “In addition to supporting existing cover crop users, I also frequently promote cover crops to farmers who are not using them,” and 110 (16.8%) said they actively promote cover crops as often as possible to a wide range of farmers. Just 8 respondents (1.2%) said they primarily provide support to farmers who already use cover crops. In total, those replies represent 6 in 10 respondents.

Meanwhile, 141 (21.6%) of the advisors said they only talk about cover crops when directly asked and 111 (16.9%) reported that they defer to someone else if asked about cover crops. Whether a factor of confidence, priority, experience, or access to information, those replies suggest the importance of understanding what would help those advisors more actively promote cover crops to a wider audience.

WHICH STATEMENT BEST DESCRIBES THE NATURE OF YOUR ADVISING AS IT RELATES TO COVER CROPS?



MOTIVATION



The survey included an open-ended question on what motivates respondents to advise growers on cover crops. Of the 500 responses, most identified benefits addressed in other questions, such as reducing soil loss, improving soil quality, and better weed control. Quite a few pointed to their own success or their personal observations of the benefits of cover crops as a driver for their enthusiasm. Following are some of the top answers, organized by theme.

A high percentage of the advisors mentioned they were motivated by soil health improvements. Among their comments:

- Being good stewards of the land and promoting soil health.
- Benefit soil health, weed control, manure management programs
- Improve soil organic matter, water infiltration, soil health and tilth.
- To save the soil and improve soil health.
- They are a powerful tool to promote soil health.
- It is critical to use cover crops if you want to make the soil healthier.
- They improve soil health and thereby improve long-term crop production.

Weed control was another commonly cited benefit:

- Benefits I see from not only the conservation side, but the agronomic benefits such as water infiltration and weed control.
- Better yields and helps on weed control.
- Improving soil health, reducing erosion and controlling weeds.
- Weed management with chemical resistant weeds and soil structure.
- To control resistant winter weeds.

MOTIVATION

Economics and profitability were also frequently mentioned, including potential for yield improvement:

- Cover crops are a great tool to be more profitable.
 - Cover crops can be a great way to incorporate livestock on the land and cut costs for producers.
 - Economics for livestock producers, weed/pest management for crop farmers.
 - Yield, soil health, and planting improvement.
 - Create a profitable and sustainable farming system.
 - Soil health, better soil infiltration, reduction in cost of inputs over time.
 - Improve soil health, better returns on cash crops in the rotation, reduce soil erosion.
 - To know that they remain profitable and can continue farming in a challenging economic environment.
-

For those that also farm, many cited improvements seen on their own farm. Among those observations:

- Have seen the improvements on my own farm for improved water infiltration, better weed control and higher yields.
 - The successes of cover crops on my farm.
 - I have used cover crops for 6 years and have seen reduced erosion and feel that by improving soil structure, increasing organic matter and reducing weeds that our yields have increased steadily over that period. It is a marathon not a sprint. It takes time to see the benefits of cover crops and if farmers don't see that in the first couple of years they may drop the practice.
 - Personally, we have seen the benefits on our own farm as well as many other producers that I have worked with. Cover crops give producers the ability to improve their soil health in many categories, while also serving as an excellent livestock food source in many situations.
 - They work well on my farm and I think they are essential for farming into the future.
-

Big-picture comments on the overall cropping system included:

- Continuous living roots are necessary for a healthy agricultural system.
- Limit erosion, reduce compaction/improve infiltration, improve spring field trafficability, cycle nutrients.
- Protects bare ground, supports soil microorganisms, keeps a living root in the system.
- Erosion control. Improve water infiltration and soil structure. Improve nutrient uptake.
- They can also act as a gateway practice for farmers and perhaps at some point, they will extend rotations, reduce inputs, or incorporate other conservation practices.
- It is my job, but I've seen firsthand how they can work and provide more benefits than single use practices like herbicides, fertilizers, or tillage.
- Working with growers in my generation that want to do what they can to preserve and build a healthier soil for generations to come.

MOTIVATION

Several advisors offered succinct summations about cover crops, including:

- Cover crops are a great tool in our toolbox!
 - They simply work.
 - Helping people help the land.
 - Soil health – we need to soil to be productive and around for generations to come.
-

Several respondents also demonstrated a strong motivation to educate growers so they can succeed with cover crops. “To educate, and to close that gap of the 4 W’s and how,” wrote one. “Be careful,” warned another, “There are alot [*sic*] of downfalls if not managed.” A third emphasized the importance of site-specific advice: “To do what is right in every situation and not allow the farmer to get caught up in the emotion and testimonials of the cover crop movement.”

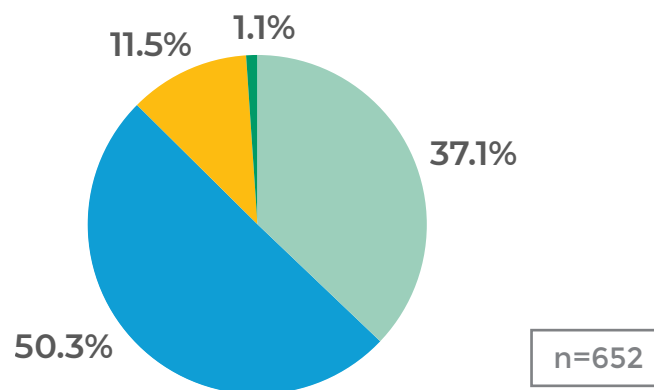
One advisor pointed to a nationwide audience for cover crop messaging, emphasizing the effort “to not only benefit the land and hopefully increase its productivity for years to come, but also show the public that farms want to take care of their resources.”



COVER CROPS' FIT

Half of the 652 respondents (328, or 50.3%) who answered a question about how cover crops fit the area they serve said the practice works in some, but not all, cases in their region. Another 242 (37.1%) agreed with the statement, “Cover crops are a great option for most of my farmers and I highly recommend them.” On the more guarded side, 75 advisors (11.5%) selected, “Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely,” and 7 (1.1%) said they do not recommend cover crops in their region.

FOR THE REGION IN WHICH I ADVISE FARMERS, MY PROFESSIONAL RECOMMENDATION ABOUT COVER CROPS IS GENERALLY:



- Cover crops are a great option for most of my farmers and I highly recommend them
- Cover crops work in some, but not all, cases in my region
- Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely
- I do not recommend cover crops in my region

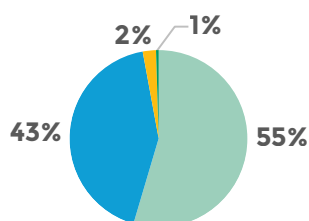
Cross-tabulating the personal experience of advisors who farm themselves with cover crops and their stance on promoting the practice yielded fascinating results. **The data strongly indicate that advisors with personal cover crop experience are more likely to recommend the practice.**

The same percentage of advisors who planted cover crops on their own farms agreed with the statement, “Cover crops work in some, but not all, cases in my region” as advisors who do not use cover crops at home—43%. However, there was a vast difference in the percentage of advisors who agreed with the sentence, “Cover crops are a great option for my farmers and I highly recommend them”: 55% of the advisors who use cover crops themselves agreed, while only 9% of the advisors who do not use cover crops did. Instead, 43% of the non-user advisors agreed with the statement, “Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely,” a statement that earned just 2% of the nods from advisors who use cover crops themselves. While only 1% of the advisors who plant cover crops checked the statement, “I do not recommend cover crops in my region,” 5% of their non-user counterparts selected that position.

Advisors who reported that they did not use cover crops on their farms but had in the past or were interested in trying them walked a line between the user and non-user groups. Of the interested non-users, 56% selected the “Cover crops work in some, but not all, cases in my region,” and 29% agreed with, “Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely.” A modest 11% said they highly recommend cover crops, and 4% said they do not recommend them.

CORRELATION BETWEEN ADVISORS' USE OF COVER CROPS AND THEIR PROMOTION OF COVER CROPS

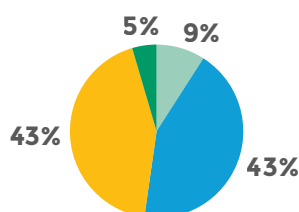
ADVISOR USES COVER CROPS



- Cover crops are a great option for most of my farmers and I highly recommend them
- Cover crops work in some, but not all, cases in my region
- Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely
- I do not recommend cover crops in my region

n=207

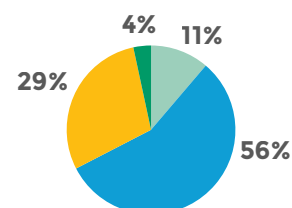
ADVISOR DOES NOT USE COVER CROPS



- Cover crops are a great option for most of my farmers and I highly recommend them
- Cover crops work in some, but not all, cases in my region
- Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely
- I do not recommend cover crops in my region

n=44

ADVISOR DOES NOT USE COVER CROPS BUT USED THEM IN THE PAST OR IS INTERESTED IN TRYING THEM



- Cover crops are a great option for most of my farmers and I highly recommend them
- Cover crops work in some, but not all, cases in my region
- Cover crops are occasionally of use, but I do not promote them widely
- I do not recommend cover crops in my region

n=89

Another cross-tab, comparing cover crop use on advisors' own farms with the proactiveness of their cover crop endorsements, yielded a similar result.

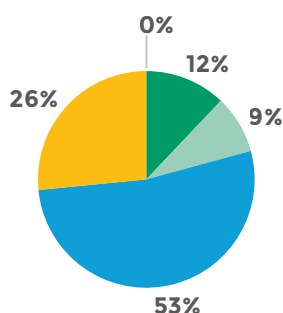
At 53% vs. 11%, advisors who use cover crops on their own farms (207 respondents) were nearly 5 times more likely than the 44 non-users to agree with the statement, “In addition to supporting existing cover crop users, I also frequently promote cover crops to farmers who are not using them,” and were 2.5 times more likely to select, “I actively promote cover crops as often as possible to a wide range of farmers” (26% of users vs. 9% of non-users).

Non-users were nearly five times more likely to “only talk about cover crops if directly asked” than users, 55% to 12%, and more than twice as likely—23% to 9%—to “primarily provide support for farmers who already use cover crops.” No advisors who use cover crops themselves said they defer to someone else when asked about cover crops, while 2% of non-users said they deferred questions.

Once again, advisors who do not use cover crops but did or are interested in trying the practice found a middle ground. Of those 89 advisors, 41% only talk about cover crops if directly asked, 25% said they frequently promote cover crops to non-users and another 25% primarily provide support to farmers already using cover crops. A modest 7% actively promote cover crops as often as possible to a wide range of farmers (compared to 26% of cover crop users), and 2% defer questions on cover crops to someone else.

CORRELATION BETWEEN ADVISORS' COVER CROP EXPERIENCE AND THE NATURE OF THEIR ADVICE ON COVER CROPS

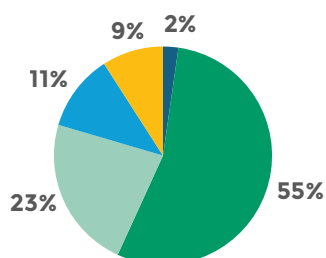
ADVISOR USES COVER CROPS



- I defer to someone else if asked about cover crops
- I only talk about cover crops if directly asked
- I primarily provide support to farmers already using cover crops
- In addition to supporting existing cover crop users, I also frequently promote cover crops to farmers who are not using them
- I actively promote cover crops as often as possible to a wide range of farmers

n=207

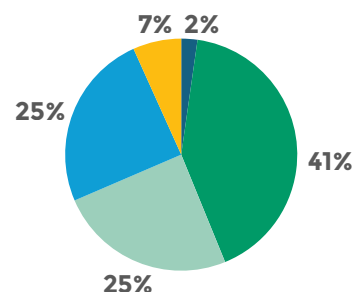
ADVISOR DOES NOT USE COVER CROPS



- I defer to someone else if asked about cover crops
- I only talk about cover crops if directly asked
- I primarily provide support to farmers already using cover crops
- In addition to supporting existing cover crop users, I also frequently promote cover crops to farmers who are not using them
- I actively promote cover crops as often as possible to a wide range of farmers

n=44

ADVISOR DOES NOT USE COVER CROPS BUT USED THEM IN THE PAST OR IS INTERESTED IN TRYING THEM

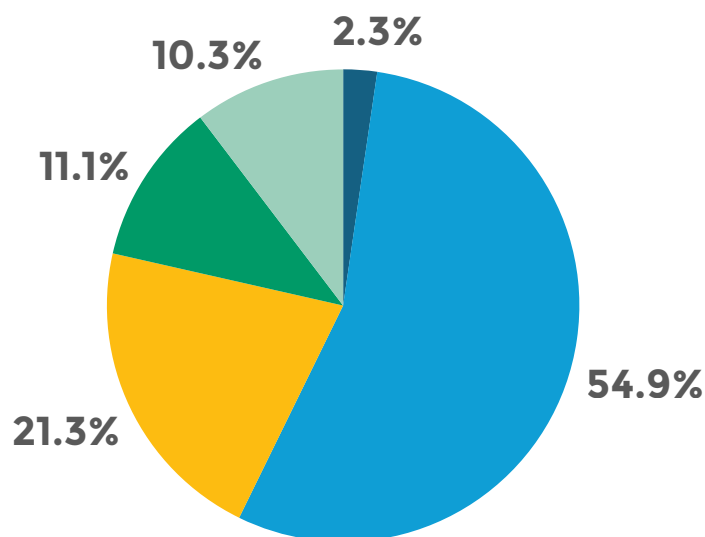


- I defer to someone else if asked about cover crops
- I only talk about cover crops if directly asked
- I primarily provide support to farmers already using cover crops
- In addition to supporting existing cover crop users, I also frequently promote cover crops to farmers who are not using them
- I actively promote cover crops as often as possible to a wide range of farmers

n=89

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, 18 million acres of U.S. farmland were planted to cover crops in 2021-2022. Among advisors participating in the 2024 National Cover Crop Survey, 54.9% (356 of 648 respondents) said 1 to 25% of their farmer clients planted cover crops. The next-highest category was 26 to 50% of clients using cover crops, reported by 138 (21.3%). The 51 to 75% category, with 72 respondents (11.1%) was nearly equaled by the 76 to 100% choice, selected by 67 (10.3%). Just 15 advisors (2.3%) reported no clients using cover crops.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR FARMER CLIENTS USE COVER CROPS?

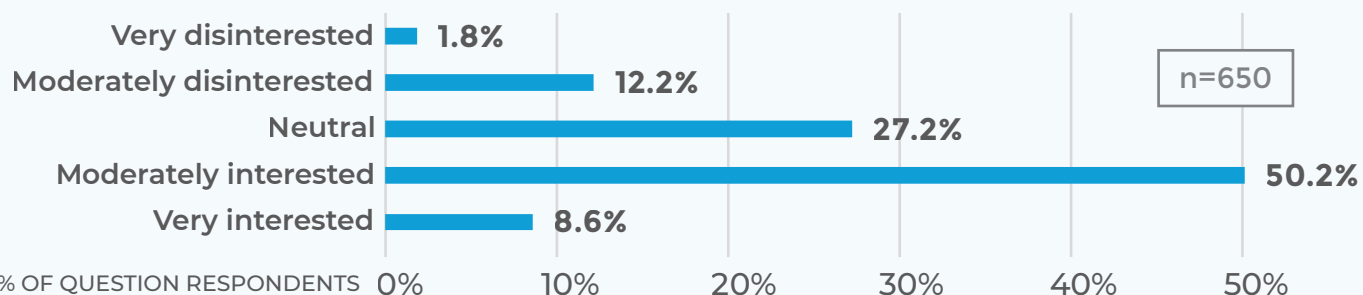


% OF CLIENTS USING COVER CROPS ■ 0% ■ 1-25% ■ 26-50% ■ 51-75% ■ 76-100%

- CLIENT INTEREST IN COVER CROPS -

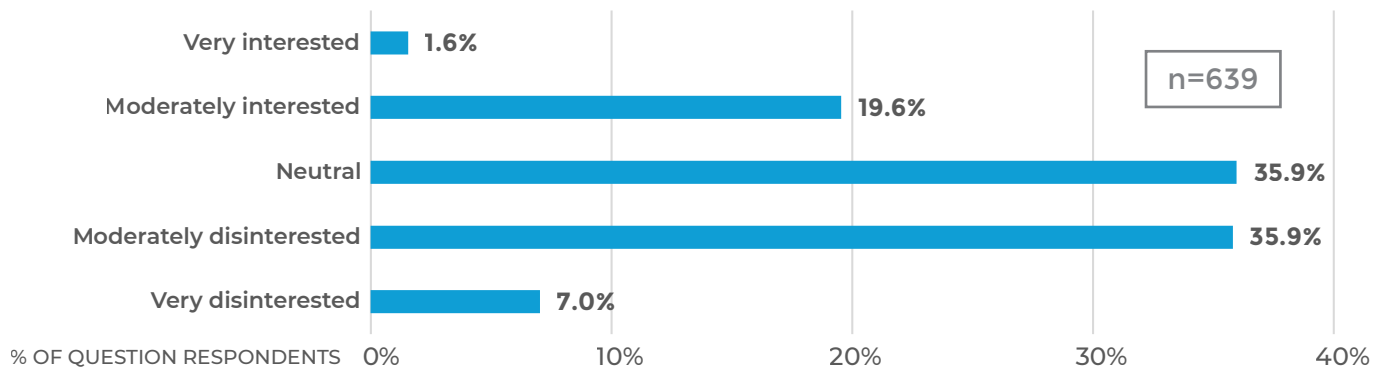
Interest in cover crops among farmers served by the respondents is high. Of 650 answers to “How would you describe interest among your farmer clients in cover crops?” half—326, or 50.2%—rated their clients as “moderately interested” and another 56 (8.6%) said their clients were “very interested.” “Neutral” was the selection of 177 (27.2%), and 79 (12.2%) said their clients were “moderately disinterested.” Only 12 (1.8%) said their farmer clients were “very disinterested” in cover crops.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE INTEREST AMONG YOUR FARMER CLIENTS IN COVER CROPS?



Zeroing in on farmer clients who do not currently use cover crops, 230 of 639 advisors (35.9%) said their non-cover-crop clients are neutral about adopting cover crops and an almost equal number—229, or 35.9%—rated their clients who do not use cover crops as moderately disinterested in adopting the practice. One hundred twenty five (19.6%) said their clients who do not use cover crops were moderately interested, and 10 (1.6%) called them very interested. Another 45 (7.0%) said their clients were very disinterested in adopting cover crops if they are not using them now.

OF YOUR CLIENTS WHO DO NOT USE COVER CROPS, WHAT IS THEIR LEVEL OF INTEREST IN ADOPTING THE PRACTICE?

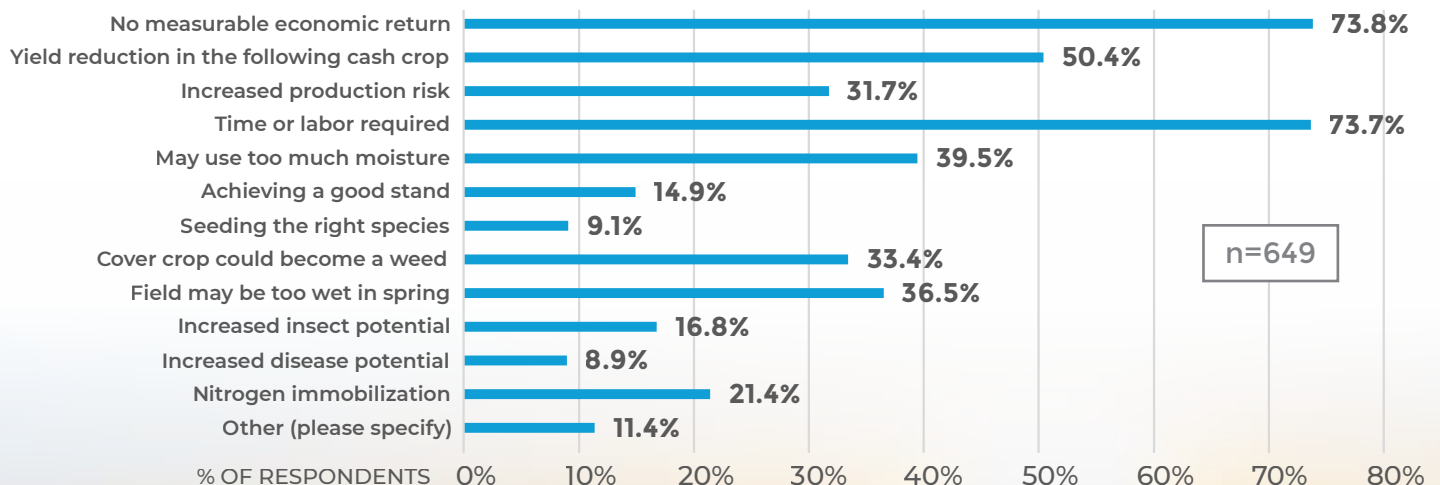


Among non-user clients, an almost equal number of advisors said the lack of perceived measurable economic return (selected by 479 of 649 respondents, or 73.8%, who were allowed to choose multiple answers) and time or labor required (selected by 478) were barriers to adoption. A similar economic worry was the third-largest barrier: concern about potential yield reduction in the following cash crop was noted by 327 (50.4%).

Concerns that the cover crop could use too much moisture was flagged by 256 advisors (39.5%); the opposite worry, that fields would be too wet in the spring, was the next most popular choice with 237 respondents (36.5%). Cover crops becoming weeds was the next worry in line, with 217 advisors (33.4%), followed by increased production risk, selected by 206 (31.7%). Nitrogen immobilization (139/21.4%) and increased insect potential (109/16.8%) were followed by worries about achieving a good stand (97, or 14.9%). Seeding the right species nearly tied with increased disease potential at 59 and 58 respondents, respectively (9.1% and 8.9%).

Seventy-four respondents (11.4%) selected “other,” writing in answers on timing or season length (19 write-ins), costs and economics (15), equipment concerns (5), and the possibility that the growers are not interested in learning new practices. One especially cynical answer was simply, “Any excuse possible.” It’s important to note that these concerns are perceptions of potential problems rather than problems actually experienced by growers; however, it is also important to identify which concerns need to be addressed through advising and education efforts, or providing better solutions with cover crops.

WHAT BARRIERS DO YOU HEAR FROM FARMERS NOT ADOPTING COVER CROPS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



STARTING & STOPPING

The 2024 survey sought advisors' perspectives on why their farmer clients start or stop using cover crops. Respondents could choose more than one answer to each question.

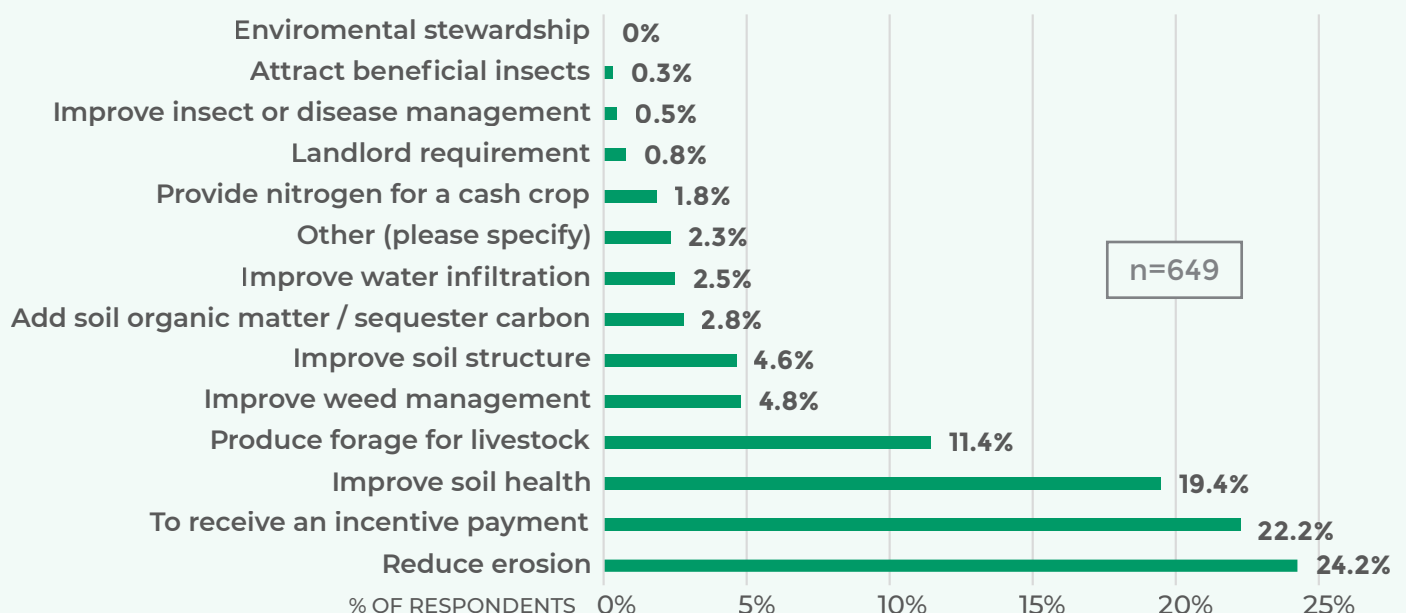
- MOTIVATIONS TO ADOPT COVER CROPS -

The clear leader in motivation for their clients to start using cover crops was reducing erosion, selected by 157 of the 649 respondents (24.2%) who answered the question. Close behind were receiving an incentive payment, chosen by 144 (22.2%), and improving soil health (126/19.4%). Coming in a relatively distant fourth place was producing forage for livestock, identified by 74 advisors (11.4%). Improving weed management, with 31 respondents (4.8%), was roughly tied with improving soil structure (30/4.6%).

Adding soil organic matter/sequestering carbon was selected by 18 respondents (2.8%), while 16 (2.5%) chose improving water infiltration, and 12 (1.8%) identified providing nitrogen for a cash crop as a motivator. Five (0.8%) said landlord requirements were a reason clients started using cover crops, while 3 (0.5%) selected improving insect or disease management and 2 (0.3%) chose attracting beneficial insects.

Fifteen respondents selected "other," writing in statements ranging from "they have not started yet" and "still working with them to take the step of committing to a planting" to notes on reducing nitrogen or herbicide costs. A few notes shared opinions on farmer interest, including "many are only interested if carrots are hung in front of them & 30 years of experience tells me 'carrots' do NOT work," and "most do not grasp soil health and everything associated with it." Not all "other" comments were negative: one advisor in orchard crops noted his growers save on herbicide by only spraying berms, while another said cover crops "save crop in spring" and a third pointed to cover crops helping growers address "a problem that they couldn't address with normal practices."

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON REASON FARMER CLIENTS HAVE STARTED USING COVER CROPS?

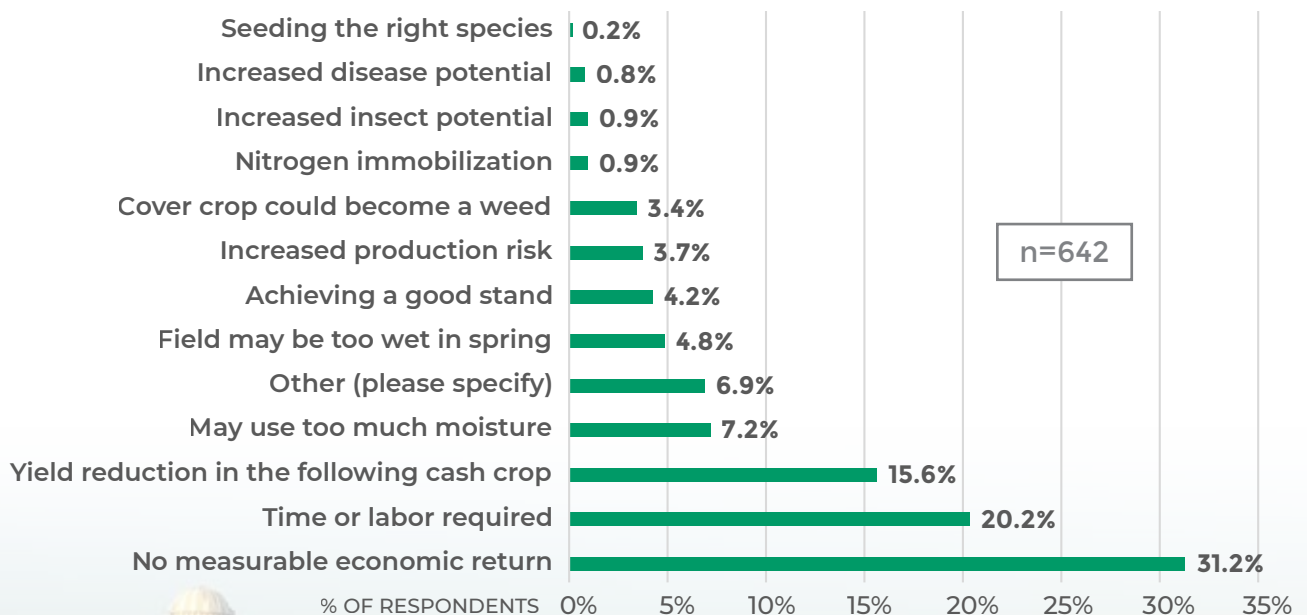


Although the survey did not ask about what percentage of clients stopped using cover crops, it did gather some information about the portion of farmers who had stopped trying them. Asked for reasons their farmer clients stopped using cover crops, the overwhelming answer—with nearly 1 in 3 respondents (200 of 642, or 31.2%)—was a lack of measurable economic return. Time and labor requirements accounted for 130 responses (20.2%), and yield reduction in the following cash crop garnered 100 (15.6%).

Concerns about cover crops using too much moisture received 46 votes (7.2%) and the opposite case—fields may be too wet in the spring—was next at 31 responses, or 4.8%. Twenty-seven respondents (4.2%) selected achieving a good stand, increased production risk was noted by 24 (3.7%), and fears of cover crops becoming weeds was identified by 22 (3.4%). Wrapping up the possibilities were nitrogen immobilization and increased insect potential at 6 votes (0.9%) apiece, increased disease potential with 5 respondents (0.8%) and concerns about seeding the right species garnering 1 note (0.2%).

Forty-four respondents selected “other” reasons clients stopped using cover crops. The most commonly cited reasons in write-ins were problems or the end of incentive programs, noted by 9 advisors. Termination challenges were cited by 7, while cost or expense was identified by 5. On a very positive note, 8 advisors commented that they have not seen any of their clients stop using cover crops once they had started with the practice.

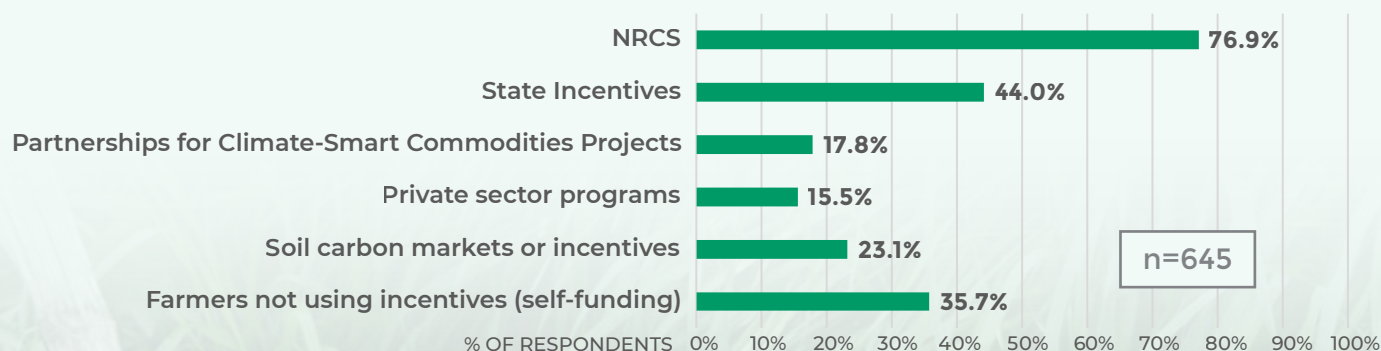
WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON REASON FARMER CLIENTS HAVE STOPPED USING COVER CROPS?



Incentives may be an increasingly important factor in encouraging farmers to adopt cover crops, particularly as the practice moves down the adoption curve from the Innovators and Early Adopters who embraced the practice over the past decade or two to now include more Early and Late Majority farmers. In fact, 230 of 645 (35.7%) of the respondents reported that their farmer clients don't use incentives, indicating that two out of three farmers served by the advisors who participated in the survey are engaged in at least one incentive program. By contrast, nearly three out of four farmers who participated in the 2022-2023 CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey—72.1%—reported that they had never received an incentive payment for using cover crops. In that survey of farmers, the largest group of users—39.5%—reported more than 10 years of cover cropping experience, and an additional 17.6% had been planting cover crops for 8 to 10 years, so the respondent pool skewed toward people inclined toward early adoption of the practice.

In the current survey, more than three-quarters of the advisors (496 of 645, or 76.9%) said their clients use incentives offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), while state incentives support 284 (44.0%). Soil carbon markets or incentives are making a mark, with 149 advisors (23.1%) noting that their clients use those programs. Incentives through Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities projects were noted by 115 respondents (17.8%), and 100 (15.5%) selected private sector programs. It should be emphasized that farmers could be using more than one of the incentive options listed, and that farmers may receive incentive payments for a portion of their cover cropped fields but not all.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF INCENTIVES YOUR FARMERS ARE UTILIZING? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



WIDE RANGE OF COVER CROP TOPICS



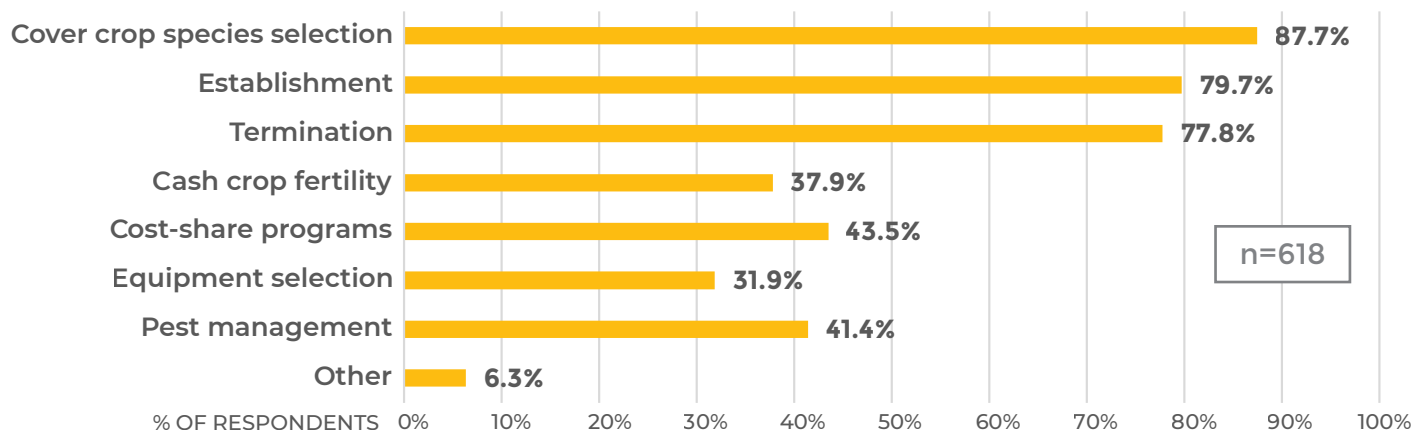
Advisors are privy to the thoughts and concerns of their farmer clients, and the questions farmers ask them about cover crops can provide deep insight into

their concerns or the advantages they seek. For a look at what farmers want to learn, the survey asked advisors to indicate the cover crop advice most in demand.

Cover crop species selection was the leading subject of advice among respondents, with 542 of 618, or 87.7%, of respondents selecting the topic among a list from which they could select as many answers as they liked. Cover crop establishment was the second most popular subject, selected by 493 (79.7%) and followed closely by termination, which was chosen by 481 (77.8%). Nearly half of the respondents advised on cost-share programs (269 respondents, or 43.5%), pest management (256/41.4%), and cash crop fertility (234/37.9%). Roughly one-third (197, or 31.9%) advised on equipment selection.

Thirty-nine (6.3%) selected “other,” which included write-in subjects such as water management, saturated buffers, planting dates, and one response specifying “plant interconnectivity.”

WHAT TOPICS DO YOU ADVISE FARMERS ON RELATED TO COVER CROPS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



OPPORTUNITIES & OBSTACLES

This survey sought to shed light not only on how many advisors are helping farmers succeed with cover crops, but also on what they encounter in the field in terms of farmer interest and concerns. The survey included a list of topics, each of which could be assigned a value in a five-point scale between “very important” and “unimportant.”

- IMPORTANT TOPICS FOR USERS -

Advisors were asked to indicate the importance of each topic to their farmer clients who use cover crops. It is important to note that a few of the 644 respondents who answered this question skipped some of the listed benefits, selecting certain specific options for evaluation rather than providing a value for every item in the list.

The largest “very important” topic was erosion control, with 396 of 644 respondents (61.5%). Another 190 advisors (29.5%) rated erosion control “somewhat important” to the farmers they serve; just 43 (6.7%) said their farmers were neutral on erosion control, and 15 (2.3%) rated it unimportant to growers.

Soil health totaled nearly the same overall percentage on the side of importance, with 289 (44.9%) “very important” and 274 (42.5%) “somewhat important” for a total of 87.4%. Just 60 (9.3%) rated soil health neutral in the eyes of their clients, and 7 (1.1%) said it was unimportant.

The next three benefits fell very closely together in the “very important” category: improved profitability (236 advisors, or 36.7%, rating it very important), increasing soil organic matter (232/36.0%), and weed control (225, or 34.9%). In this group, increasing soil organic matter was noted as moderately interesting to clients by 334 advisors (51.9%), making the total positive level of importance of soil organic matter—the sum of “very important” or “somewhat important” values—roughly equal to the overall perceived importance of erosion control and soil health. It is also interesting to note that of those three benefits, improved profitability received a relatively high “neutral” rating from 172 (26.7%) of respondents.

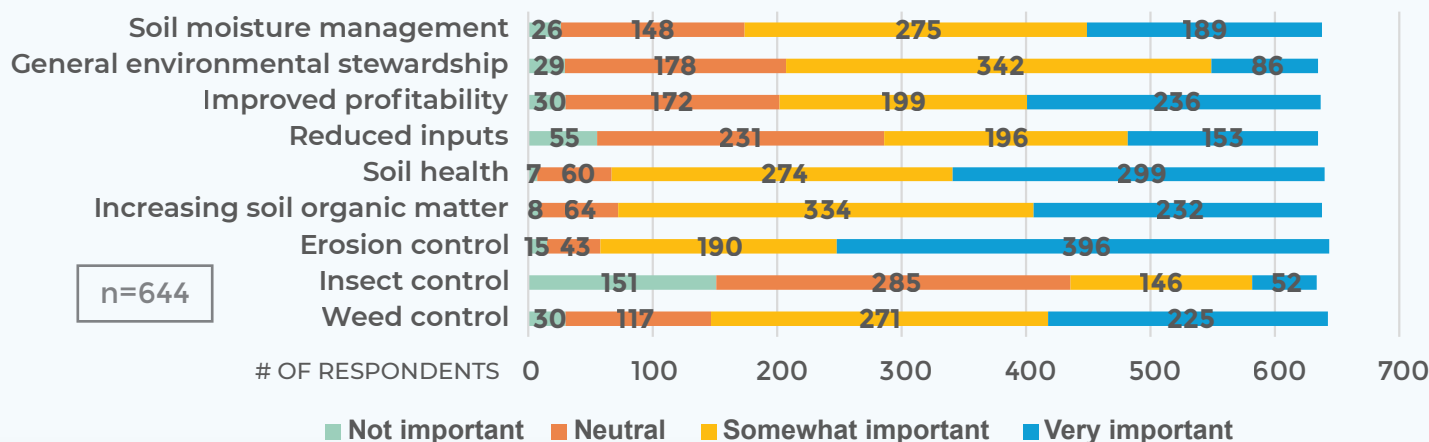


With 189 responses of “very important” (29.3%) and 275 (42.7%) noting it as moderately important, soil moisture management fell close to the preceding benefits, followed by reduced inputs at 153 (23.8%) very important and 196 (30.4%) moderately important. Reduced inputs marks the answer in which neutral and negative responses become more prominent, with 231 advisors (35.9%) noting that their clients are neutral on the benefit and 55 (8.5%) reporting that their farmers think reduced inputs from cover crops is not important.

General environmental stewardship garnered its highest response in the moderate category, with 342 advisors (53.1%) saying their clients found it moderately important and 86 (13.4%) very important. According to 178 (27.6%), farmers are neutral on general environmental stewardship as a cover crop benefit, and 29 advisors (4.5%) said it was not important to their growers.

Insect control from cover crops skewed most heavily to the “less important” side, with just 52 advisors (8.1%) marking it very important to their clients and 146 (22.7%) calling it moderately important. Insect control received the highest neutral rating, with 285 responses (44.3%), and the highest rating of non-importance at 151 (23.4%).

TO YOUR CLIENTS WHO USE COVER CROPS, HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS?



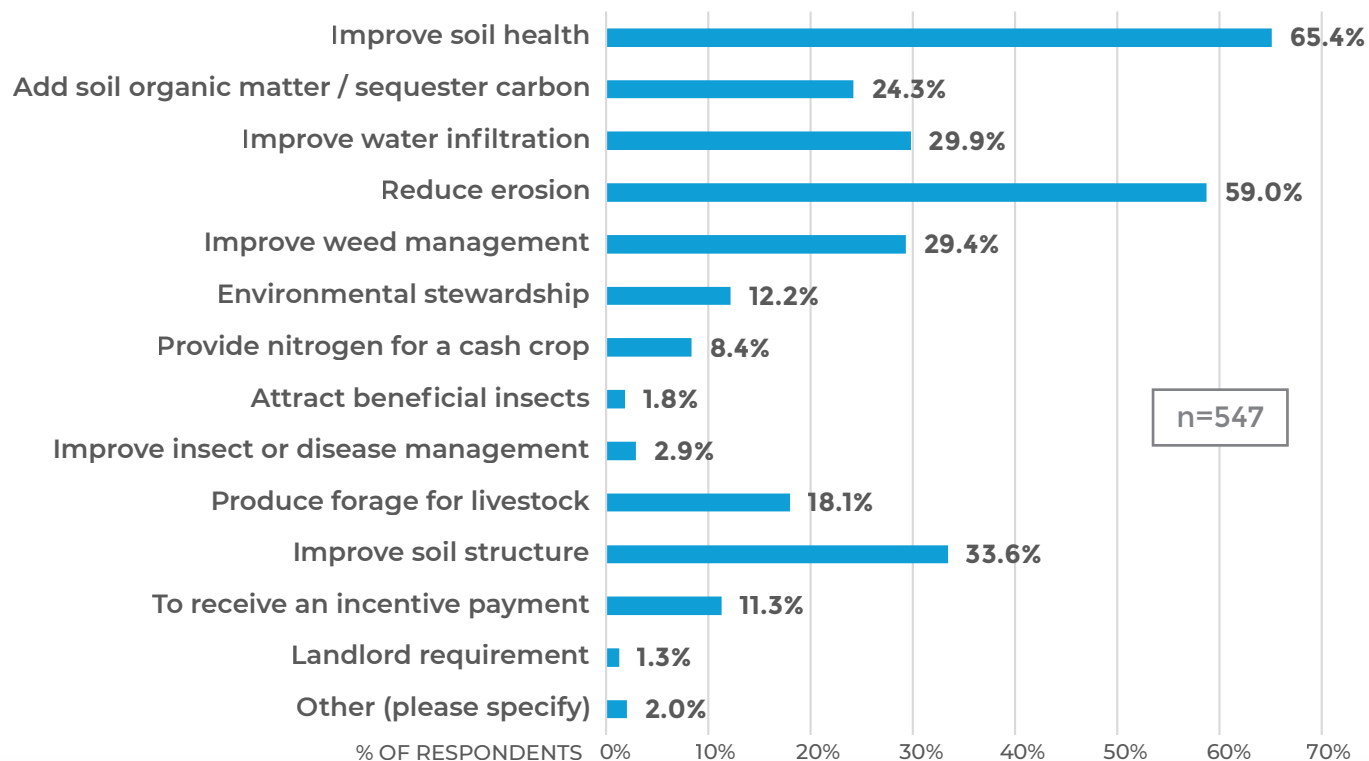
- TOP THREE PROMOTED BENEFITS -

Advisors seem well in tune with the cover crop issues that are important to their clients. Asked “What are your top three promoted benefits when advising farmers new to cover crops?” the 547 respondents who identified three topics selected a wide range of options. The leading benefit—selected by 358 advisors, or 65.4%—was improving soil health, followed by reducing erosion at 323 (59.0%). Improving soil structure came in third with 184 responses (33.6%), ahead of water infiltration at 164 (29.9%), which was closely followed improved weed management 161, or 29.4%.

The next two benefits reflected more easily quantifiable outcomes. Adding soil organic matter/sequestering carbon was selected by 133 respondents (24.3%) and producing forage for livestock was the choice of 99 (18.1%). Environmental stewardship garnered 67 checks (12.2%), followed by receiving incentive payments (62/11.3%) and providing nitrogen for a cash crop (46, or 8.4%). At the bottom of the list, improving insect or disease management received 16 votes (2.9%) and attracting beneficial insects was selected by 10 (1.8%) and landlord requirement was only selected by 7 (1.3%) of the respondents.

“Other,” chosen by 11 (2.0%), was dominated by nutrient cycling—written in by 6 of the advisors—and water management, which was referenced by 4. Other notes included the role of cover crops in achieving organic certification, economics, and one advisor’s comment that “they are all linked.”

WHAT ARE YOUR **TOP THREE** PROMOTED BENEFITS WHEN ADVISING FARMERS NEW TO COVER CROPS?

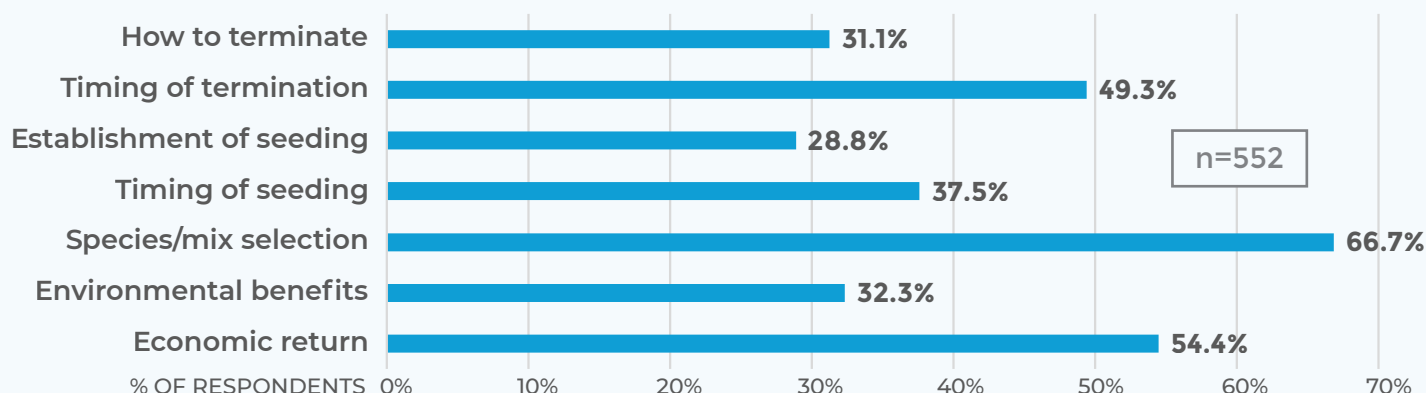


- TOP BARRIERS TO TRYING COVER CROPS -

Barriers to trying cover crops or succeeding with them appear to drive many of the questions advisors report answering most. Asked to select the top three cover crop topics they are asked about most by farmers, species mix selection was number 1 with 368 responses (66.7% of the 552 advisors who followed the instruction to select three choices). Questions about economic returns from cover crops came in second with 300 advisors (54.4%), while timing of termination was the pick of 272 (49.3%) and the closely related question of how to terminate cover crops was noted by 172 (31.1%).

Seeding—either the timing of cover crop seeding, selected by 207 (37.5%) or establishment of cover crop seed, the choice of 159 (28.8%)—is also widely sought information. One in 3 advisors (178, or 32.3%) noted that the farmers they advise place environmental benefits of cover crops in their top 3 topics of inquiry.

WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE TOPICS YOU ARE MOST ASKED ABOUT BY FARMERS WHEN IT COMES TO COVER CROPS?



- BARRIERS TO PROMOTING COVERS -

The largest barriers to advisors' promotion of cover crops revolve around priorities: 285 of 628 respondents (45.4%) said their other responsibilities take priority and 237 (37.7%) said most of their clients aren't interested in cover crops. Major cover crop failures in the past dissuaded 184 (29.3%) respondents, while 142 (22.6%) said they needed more data on cover crops and 54 (8.6%) said they need more experience with cover crops. (Respondents could check as many answers to this question as they liked.)

There were also quite a significant number of write-in barriers—118 (18.8%) advisors wrote in specific challenges. The most commonly cited write-in barriers were on economics, including more than 20 comments ranging from the costs of inputs and labor to concerns over return on investment. "Most ask for a firm R.O.I. from cover crops," wrote one. "The status quo government policy is easier and less risky," noted another.

Cropping season and timing issues were mentioned approximately 16 times, as were local conditions. “Our season is too short. They get planted and two weeks later get frosted out and die,” wrote an advisor in a typical write-in statement to the question. Lack of adequate rainfall to support cover crops was cited by several others.

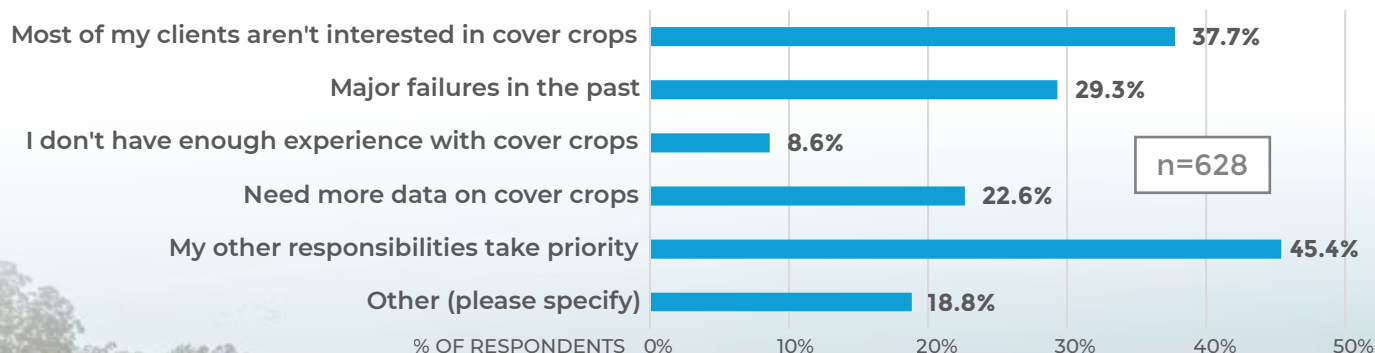
A few advisors pointed to lack of program support or misalignment between programs and practices in the field. For instance, one advisor pointed out that “many plant corn grain which is harvested too late for a cover crop planting to meet NRCS seeding date requirements.” Another complained that incentive programs did not permit grazing.

Tensions also exist between some advisors and other information sources in the field. “Some other agencies don’t like hearing research information so I’ve tended to get ‘eliminated’ from meetings/etc....where they are discussed—or I remove myself from them because of the criticism I know I’m going to get for not being ‘all in,’” wrote one frustrated advisor. Another pointed to “misinformation by those who don’t understand diversity.”

There is no doubt that barriers can be significant. “I battle some uncertainty as to whether or not they are making a different *[sic]* and if the farm has time/resources to get it done. This can stop the conversation before it has even happened,” noted one respondent.

Many of the barriers can be addressed through communication, both to provide advisors with the data and techniques that can inspire them to increase the priority level of cover crops and give them tools to deliver sound advice, and to farmers to increase demand and reduce concerns about the practice.

WHAT BARRIERS LIMIT YOUR ABILITY TO ADVISE MORE FARMERS ON COVER CROPS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



EDUCATION & TRAINING



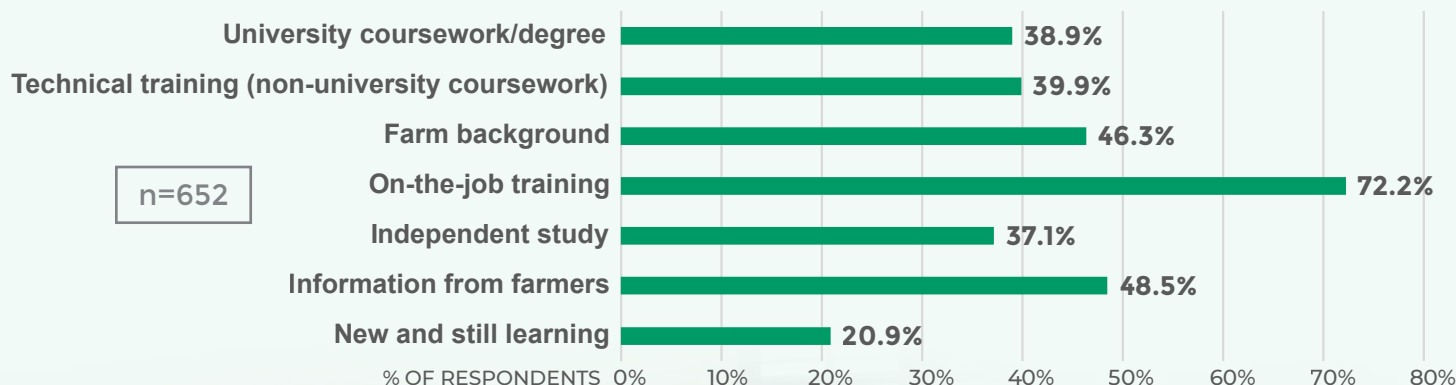
Understanding where and how advisors initially learn about cover crops and keep current on developments in the practice is extremely important. Creating training opportunities can help researchers and other stakeholders reach advisors and help many of them build their working knowledge and confidence. In turn, that can help them more effectively and aggressively help clients succeed with cover crops.

- INITIAL KNOWLEDGE -

The survey asked where respondents developed their initial knowledge of cover crops. By far, with 471 of the 652 respondents (72.2%), the most popular answer was on-the-job training. Participants were allowed to select more than one answer; the second-ranked source for cover crop knowledge was information from farmers (316/48.5%), followed closely by their own farm background (302/46.3%).

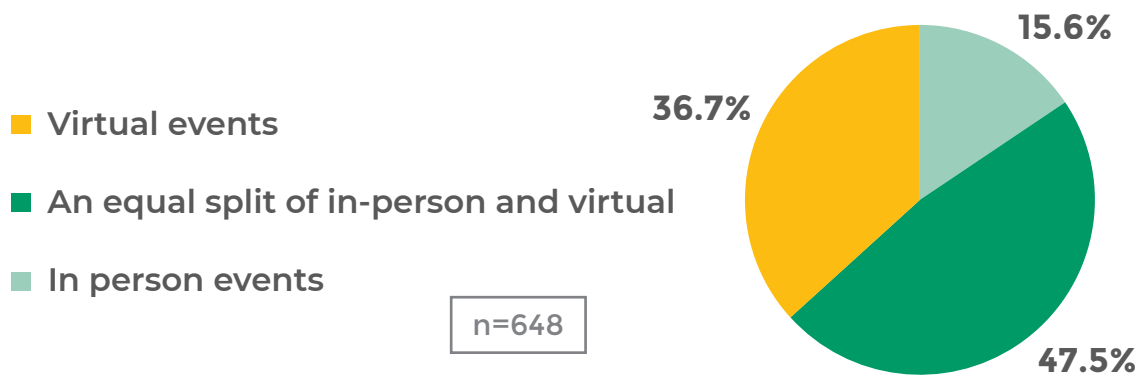
Non-university coursework or technical training was selected by 260 advisors (39.9%), almost equal to university coursework or degree with 254 (38.9%). Independent study was the root of knowledge for 242 (37.1%), while 136 (20.9%) said they were new and still learning.

WHERE DID YOU DEVELOP YOUR INITIAL BASE OF KNOWLEDGE ON COVER CROPS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



The 2024 survey asked advisors where they primarily seek formal training on new information about cover crops. One-third—238 of 648 respondents, or 36.7%—attend virtual events, while 101 (15.6%) prefer in-person training, and 308 (47.5%) use an equal split of in-person and virtual training.

WHEN RECEIVING FORMAL TRAINING TO LEARN NEW INFORMATION ON COVER CROPS, WHICH TYPE OF EVENTS DO YOU PRIMARILY ATTEND?

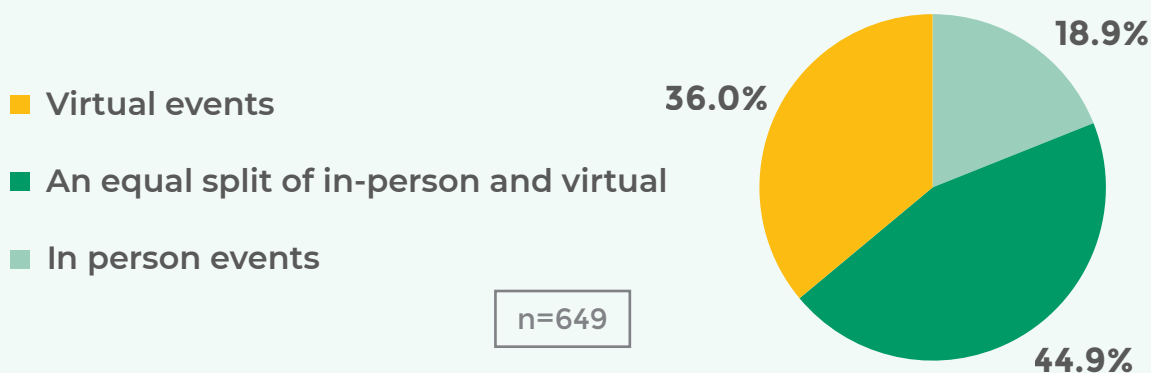


- FUTURE TRAINING -

Continued education on cover crops is of interest to a significant number of advisors. Respondents in the 2024 survey who identified themselves as Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) were asked about the importance of continuing education units (CEUs) from trainings and 289 of the 504 respondents (57.3%) rated them very important, 182 (36.1%) called them somewhat important, and 30 (5.9%) said they were neutral about CEUs' value. Just 3 CCAs (0.6%) said the credits were not important.

Future training is likely to look very much the same: 234 of 649 (36.0%) said they would like future cover crop training to be virtual, 123 (18.9%) hope for in-person, and 292 (44.9%) would like an equal mix of in-person and online training in the years to come.

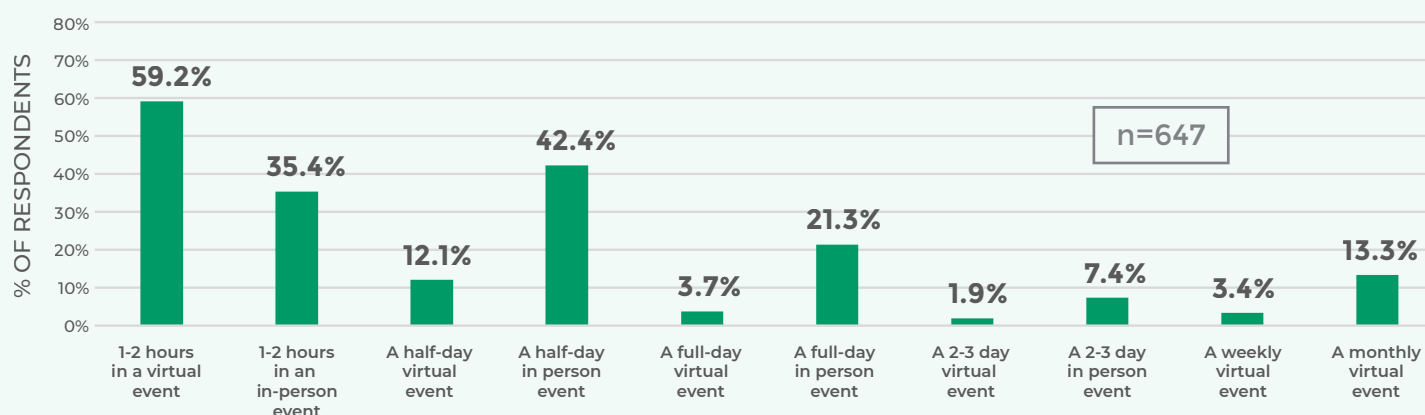
FOR FUTURE TRAINING, WHAT TYPES OF EVENTS WOULD YOU BE MOST INTERESTED IN ATTENDING?



The survey dug deeper to help cover crop advocates plan the length and delivery of training programs. Shorter commitments dominated the answers. Among 647 advisors who were allowed to select more than one answer, the most popular response to “How much time would you like to spend in future cover crop training events?” was 1 to 2 hours in a virtual training event, selected by 383 (59.2%). The second-leading format was a half-day in-person training, which received 274 votes (42.4%), followed by 1 to 2 hours in an in-person event (229/35.4%).

Well below the half-day-or-less answers came a full-day in-person event, preferred by 138 advisors (21.3%, or half the proportion who selected half-day in-person training). A monthly virtual event was favored by 86 respondents (13.3%), though the length of the training was not specified. Half-day virtual events were selected by 78 participants (12.1%), followed by a 2-to-3-day in-person event (48/7.4%), a full-day virtual event (24/3.7%), a weekly virtual event (22/3.4%), and finally a 2-to-3-day virtual event with 12 responses (1.9%).

HOW MUCH TIME WOULD YOU LIKE TO SPEND IN FUTURE COVER CROP TRAINING EVENTS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



Though the management of cover crops can be quite specific to local conditions, nearly 2 out of 3 advisors (399 of 645, or 61.8%) said they would travel outside their advising areas to see cover crops in other regions, while 246 (38.1%) said they would not.



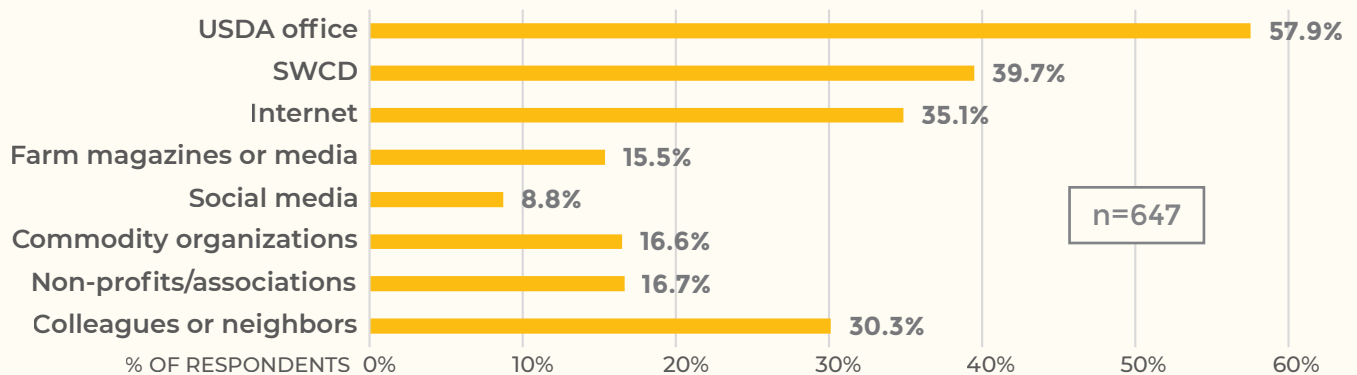
SHARING INFORMATION

A key finding of the CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey program has long been insight into information sources. Understanding where farmers, advisors, and other stakeholders get their information and learning what they want to know are vital to providing the data, details, and encouragement to help producers succeed with cover crops.

- INFORMATION ON COST-SHARE OPPORTUNITIES -

Asked where they go for information on available cover crop cost-share opportunities, more than half of the advisors (363 of 627, or 57.9%) consulted the USDA office. Respondents could select more than one answer, but USDA was by far the most popular information source on cost-share. Soil and water conservation district offices were listed by 249 (39.7%), followed by the internet (220, or 35.1%) and colleagues or neighbors, identified by 190 (30.3%). Non-profits or associations was nearly tied at 105 respondents (16.7%) with community organizations at 104 (16.6%), followed closely by farm magazines or media with 97 (15.5%). Social media garnered the smallest number of responses, at 55 (8.8%).

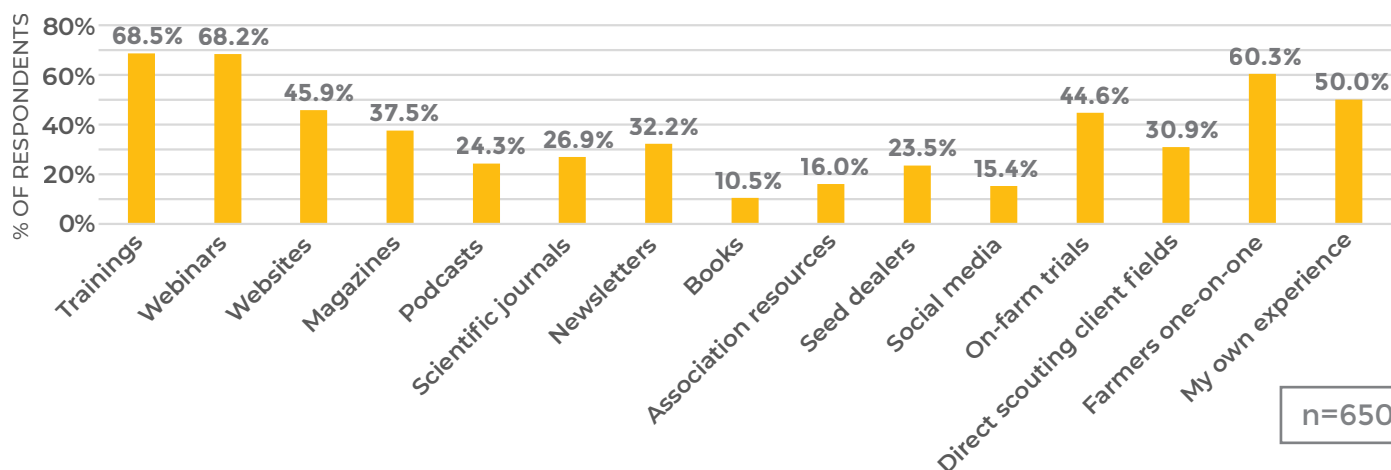
WHERE DO YOU GO FOR INFORMATION ON AVAILABLE COVER CROP COST SHARE OPPORTUNITIES? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



- INFORMATION ON COVER CROPS -

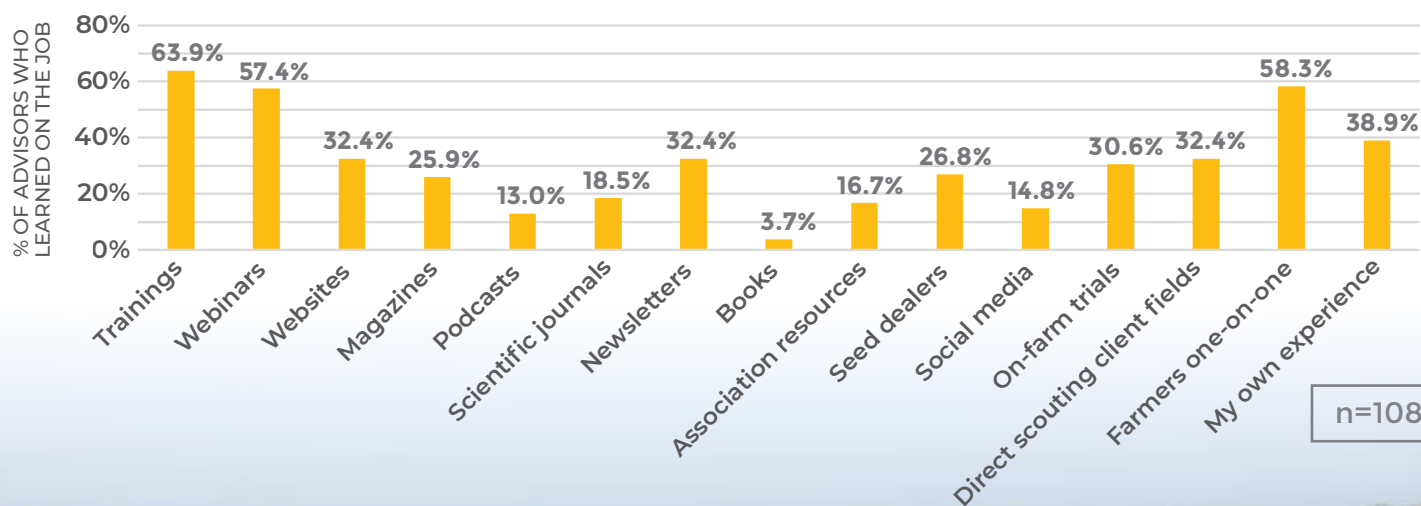
Asked where they currently get information on cover crops and encouraged to select as many sources as they wished, 445 of 646 advisors (68.5%) identified trainings, just two responses over webinars (443, or 68.2%). One-on-one communications with farmers was next with 392 responses (60.3%), followed by “my own experience,” selected by 325 (50.0%). Websites (298/45.9%) were closely followed by on-farm trials (290/44.6%). Magazines accounted for 244 responses (37.5%) and newsletters were selected by 209 (32.2%). Direct scouting of clients’ fields was noted by 201 (30.9%) followed by scientific journals (175/26.9%), podcasts (158/24.3%), and seed dealers (153/23.5%). Association resources (104/16.0%) were nearly equal to social media (100/15.4%), which came in above books (68/10.5%).

WHERE DO YOU CURRENTLY GET INFORMATION ON COVER CROPS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



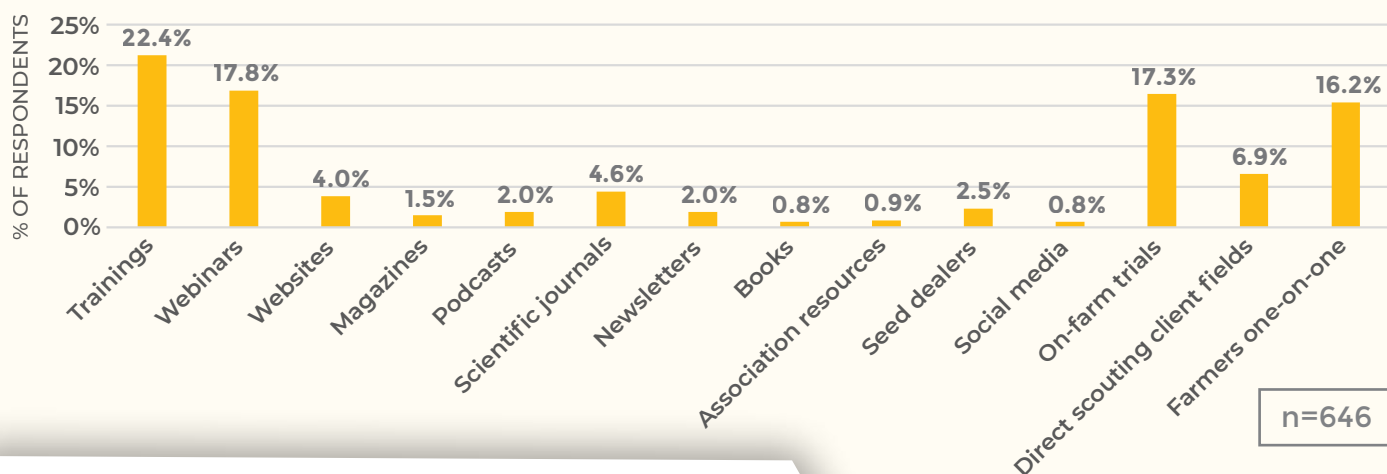
The survey team also tabulated the data from this question specifically for the 108 respondents who said they initially learned about cover crops on the job. Their top source of information was the same as the answers in the general data pool: trainings, with 63.9% of the respondents. This group, however, ranked one-on-one farmer interactions next, at 58.3%, closely followed at 57.4% by webinars. “My own experience” was the fourth-ranked choice (38.9%), as it was with the general data pool, and with 32.4% of the responses, direct scouting of clients’ fields appeared higher in priority among on-the-job learners than in the general pool.

SOURCES OF COVER CROP INFORMATION AMONG ADVISORS WHO INITIALLY LEARNED ABOUT COVER CROPS ON THE JOB



The survey then asked all advisors for their top preference for information sources while gathering cover crop insights, exploring whether there is a desire to move toward certain information channels. Trainings were the top choice with 145 of 646 respondents (22.4%), followed by webinars (115/17.8%), on-farm trials (112/17.3%), and one-on-one interactions with farmers (105/16.2%). There was a drop to directly scouting clients' fields (45/6.9%), scientific journals (30/4.6%) and websites (26/4.0%). Seed dealers were favored by 16 advisors (2.5%). Podcasts and newsletters were equal at 13 respondents apiece (2.0%), followed by magazines at 10 (1.5%), association resources (6/0.9%), and social media and books at 5 apiece (0.8%).

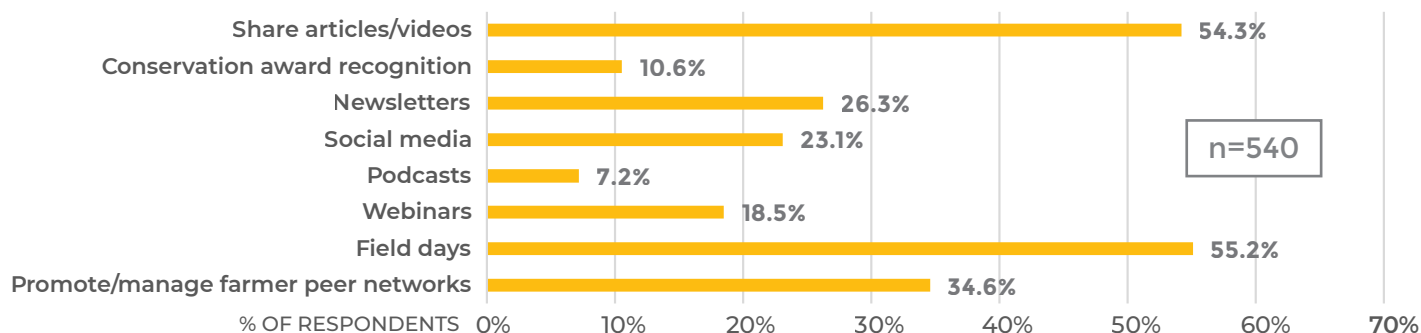
WHAT IS YOUR TOP PREFERENCE FOR GETTING INFORMATION ABOUT COVER CROPS?



- COMMUNICATING WITH CLIENTS -

Crop advisors use a wide range of communication tools in supporting the adoption of cover crops. Of 540 respondents who advised growers on cover crops, 298 (55.2%) conducted or promoted field days, and a similar number, 293 (54.3%) shared articles or videos. Promoting or managing farmer peer networks was a strategy adopted by 187 advisors (34.6%), while 142 (26.3%) used newsletters, 125 (23.1%) employed social media, and 100 (18.5%) put on webinars. Recognizing cover crop users with conservation awards was a choice of 57 advisors (10.6%), while podcasts were a tool of 39 (7.2%).

IN ADDITION TO YOUR ADVISING, WHAT OTHER STRATEGIES DO YOU USE TO FURTHER SUPPORT FARMERS WITH COVER CROP ADOPTION? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



FUTURE TRENDS

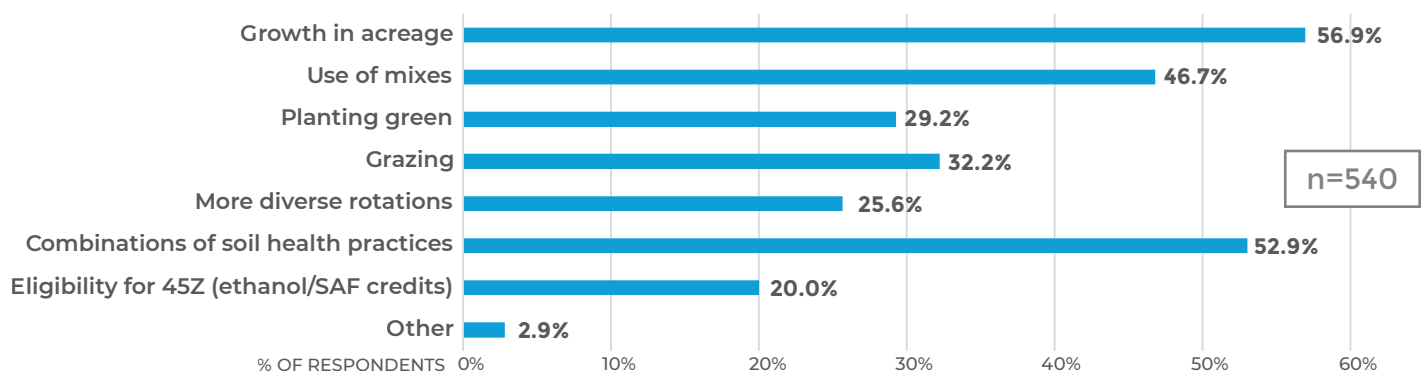


With an opportunity to communicate regularly with farmers and view a wide range of practices, crop advisors are uniquely positioned to spot emerging trends in farming. The 2024 survey asked advisors what cover crop-associated trends they anticipated. Nearly all the respondents answered, and their responses give cause for optimism.

More than half of the advisors (364 of 640, or 56.9%) expected to see a growth in cover crop acreage. Combinations of soil health practices were predicted by 339 respondents (52.9%), and the use of cover crop mixes was noted by 299 (46.7%). The next band of responses was led by trends toward grazing cover crops (206/32.2%), planting green (187, or 29.2%), and more diverse rotations (164, or 25.6%). Eligibility for 45Z credits that encourage ethanol or sustainable aircraft fuel production was flagged by 128, or 20.0%.

Nineteen respondents marked “other” and wrote in answers ranging from changes in government programs (3) to increasing sophistication in species selection or mixes. One advisor combined a prediction of increased use of forage mixes with reduced seeding rates and later plantings of cover crops. Three respondents said they expected no new trends or weren’t sure what to expect.

WHAT TRENDS ARE YOU ANTICIPATING ASSOCIATED WITH COVER CROPS? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.



CONCLUSION

The results of the 2024-2025 CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey provide a look at key influencers who maintain direct contact with growers in the field, in input purchases, and in the offices where incentives and challenges are discussed in detail. Interest in cover crops is strong, as is demand for more information on cover cropping and its benefits. Advisors and their clients are well aware of challenges—in agronomy, business, and program structures—and are interested in how they may be overcome. Hungry for information and willing to use a wide range of channels to both learn and teach, these trusted advisors will be key allies in helping farmers identify opportunities for success with cover crops and help their clients enjoy the benefits cover crops provide.

They certainly understand the stakes. As one advisor wrote in an open-answer space in the online survey instrument, cover crops represent “conservation for the future generations. We are depleting our soils, if we keep up with some of the practices we do, they will totally deplete/destroy the soil. Life comes from the soil, so without it we are nothing.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON COVER CROPS, VISIT:

<https://www.sare.org/resources/cover-crops/>

https://www.ctic.org/projects/Cover_Crops_Research_and_Demonstration

<https://www.betterseed.org/cover-crops/>

<https://cra.missouri.edu/topics/cover-crops/>

<https://farmersforsoilhealth.com/>

<https://www.ctic.org/OpTIS>

TO READ PAST NATIONAL COVER CROP SURVEY REPORTS, VISIT:

https://www.ctic.org/data/Cover_Crops_Research_and_Demonstration_Cover_Crop_Survey

