

CAN COVER CROPS BENEFIT VEGETABLE FIELDS? YES!

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A key issue many farms have is a lack of good soil health. With the introduction of “cheaper” commercial fertilizers (especially nitrogen) in the 1960’s many farmers substituted best farming practices with greater nutrient inputs. While production per acre has increased on most farms, recent cost of inputs (and the need for additional inputs) reduces the profitability potential per acre. Intensive farming practices have generally reduced soil organic matter, soil biological activity, and earthworm populations, while often increasing compaction, soilborne diseases, and erosion.

Over the past 8-10 years cover crops have “taken the stage” again on many vegetable and row crop farms to re-build soil health and productivity. Producers using cover crops realize many benefits including increased profitability. In this presentation we will look at several benefits that can be realized by producers and also some challenges that may be found with cover cropping. We will also investigate which cover crops may present problems for vegetable acres which ones might provide the greatest benefits.