

34°

Overcast



SUBSCRIBE HERE

http://www.agrinews.com/news/iowa_news/avid-student-of-cover-crops-continues-his-education/article_4a55d707-e737-5ed5-a127-a7b58e4eded5.html

CENTERPIECE

TOP STORY

'Avid student of cover crops' continues his education

Jean Caspers-Simmet, simmet@agrinews.com Dec 1, 2015



Jean Caspers-Simmet/Agri News

Louis Beck talks about growing cover crops during an Iowa Learning Farms/Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project and his wife, Pat's, farm at Buckingham. Liz Juchems, ILF event coordinator, looks on.

BUCKINGHAM, Iowa — Louis Beck calls himself an avid student of cover crops which he started to use two years ago.

Beck and his wife, Pat, hosted an Iowa Learning Farms/Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project cover crop field day recently on their Century Farm nearing Buckingham. The meeting was held in a corn crib which Pat had moved from a neighboring farm. They are currently restoring the structure to be used as a gathering place and for storage. Louis hopes to install refrigeration so they can sell apples on the farm from the orchard they manage.

The couple also raise meat goats and no-till 400 acres of corn and soybeans.



Beck said he uses cover crops for soil tilth. About eight years ago he went to all no-till.

"That has definitely improved my soil tilth and organic matter, but I think it could be better," Beck said. "I have regular soil testing done, and I'm not really where I want to be on organic matter percent."

While he has good CSR land, some is sloping and that's where he is growing cover crops.

The Becks participate in the Miller Creek Watershed program. One of their tile outlets off Tama Road is a water monitoring location for nitrates.

"It looks like I'm in the middle, but I know I can be better," Beck said. "I have put cover

crops on the areas that feed into Miller Creek, which actually starts up in my field."

Beck said he also uses cover crops because he wants to preserve his soil for generations to come. The fields where he has cover crops have been in his family for more than 100 years.

Growing cover crops has been an education.

"I'm not discouraged, but I have been disappointed by what has happened the past two years trying to establish cover crops," Beck said.

Last year, he seeded a mixture of field radishes and oats. He wanted something that would winter kill so he wouldn't have to worry about killing it the next spring. He had "kind of a good stand, kind of uneven." He attended several cover crop clinics in the spring and this year changed to annual rye grass and field radishes. He is still not completely satisfied because the stand is still uneven.

The fields were seeded into standing soybeans and corn Aug. 27 using Lanehaven Farms' Hagie Cover Crop Interseeder. The next day it rained 1.5 inches.

"I thought that would be perfect, but I still didn't have the stand I had hoped," Beck said.

"The sides of the hills were it needs to be tilled did a little better so I think it has to do with soil moisture on top of the ground. Also, this year we went to 15 inch rows with soybeans and maybe the soybean ground was shaded out more than it should have been."

Beck will try again next year and now is thinking he might go with something like cereal rye that will come back in the spring.

"I hope to do more education to make this work," he said.

He has 140 acres seeded to cover crops. Soils are Dinsdale and Dinsdale/Kenyon. Seed was \$17 per acre with a \$10 per acre application cost.

During the field Blake Hollis, of Lanehaven Farms, Waterloo, displayed his Hagie Cover Crop Interseeder and answered questions about using a highboy seeder to overseed cover crops. He also showed samples of annual rye grass, field radish and rapeseed that he dug from fields earlier in the day.

Economic value of cover crops is \$6.06 per ton of soil saved

Jamie Benning, ISU Extension Water Quality Program manager, and Liz Juchems, Iowa learning Farms event coordinator, shared the results of an ILF/Practical Farmers of Iowa study looking at the economic value of reduced soil erosion and reduced nutrient loss from cover crops.

"Combining the average value of soil loss due to erosion, which is \$0.49, and the lost nutrient value, which is \$5.57, the estimate per ton of soil is \$6.06," Juchems said. "For each ton of soil that is kept in place through conservation practices such as cover crops, \$6.06 can be credited to that practice and help offset the cost of implementation."

Juchems said they plan to expand research to include the value of gully erosion suppression, nutrient uptake and subsequent release to the following crop, and long-term soil quality improvement. A publication is also planned on the economic benefits of grazing cover crops.

More information on the study is available at www.extension.iastate.edu/ilf.

Miller Creek by the numbers

Shane Wulf, project coordinator of the Miller Creek Water Quality Improvement Project located south of Waterloo in Black Hawk County, provided an update on the project which is finishing its second year.

In 2015 there were:

- 2,700 acres of cover crops signed up with Water Quality Initiative funding or Regional Conservation Partnership Program funding.

- 748.6 acres of strip-till/no-till



- 648 acres of nitrification inhibitors

- 1 bioreactor installed and plans for another one in the spring

- 1 saturated buffer installed

- 4 acres of prairie strips

- 4.68 acres of grassed waterways

- 76.19 acres of filter strips

- 11 acres of riparian buffers

- 120.32 acres of pheasant recovery

- 581 acres of pollinator habitat

- 270 samples were taken for the project's water monitoring program

- Spring and fall samples were taken on fields with new conservation practices for Haney Soil Health tests.

Steve Hershner, Cedar Rapids Utilities director, gave an overview of the new Middle Cedar Partnership water quality project with Cedar Rapids and 16 other partners. Miller Creek is a part of that project.

For more information on Miller Creek visit <http://blackhawksacd.org/miller-creek/>.

