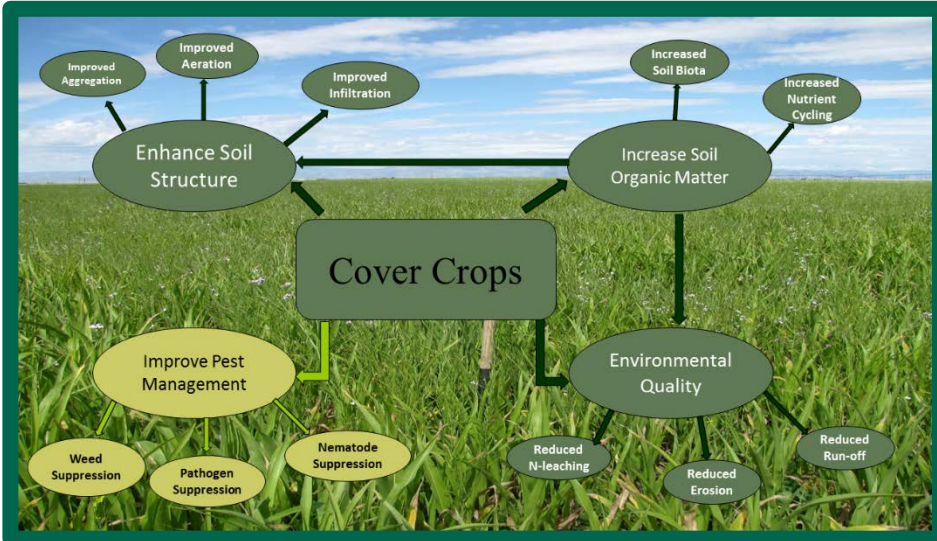


COVER CROPS



DESCRIPTION

Cover crops are annual grasses, legumes and/or forbs usually grown after the harvest of main crops or crop failure to cover soil and reduce erosion. Cover crops can have many benefits in improving soil and environmental qualities. They use residual soil nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) and can reduce leaching of these nutrients to the groundwater or surface water bodies. Legumes can fix nitrogen and increase soil fertility. Cover crops tilled into the soil can also be used as green manure. Producers growing shallow-rooted crops and crops that terminate early in the fall and/or leave little plant residue are most likely to benefit from growing cover crops.

Choosing which plant species to use for cover cropping will depend on your production goals, your soil, climate and irrigation limitations. In semi-arid regions, care must be taken to balance the benefits of cover crops with the water required to grow them. Additionally, cover crops should be selected carefully and terminated appropriately to make sure they do not serve as a bridge between crops for insects and diseases.

http://www.sare.org/content/download/29733/413984/Managing_Cover_Crops_Profitably.pdf

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/mg/gardennotes/244.html>

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

- Cover crops are a BMP that can prevent the transport of nutrients during the non-crop period.
- Other potential benefits of cover crops may include:
 - Reduce erosion from wind and water.
 - Increase soil organic matter content.
 - Capture and recycle or redistribute nutrients in the soil profile.
 - Promote biological nitrogen fixation.
 - Increase biodiversity.
 - Provide weed suppression.
 - Provide supplemental forage.

IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Cost= MED-HIGH

Operation and Maintenance= LOW

Training= MED

EFFECTIVENESS

Cover crops can sequester excess soil N and P following harvest, reducing potential for leaching and runoff.