

Widening the Use of Cover Crops in the Midwest

GREAT LAKES
REGION



National Themes:
Nutrient and Pesticide Management
Watershed Management

Project Description

Planting of cover crops helps prevent soil erosion and increases nutrient recycling on farmlands, thereby also decreasing the soil and nutrient loads entering lakes and waterways. Following a multi-state Cover Crops Summit in August 2006, the Great Lakes Regional Water Program and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation came together to study and promote this important conservation practice. A strategic planning meeting, attended by a diverse group from academia, production agriculture, non-governmental organizations, commodity interests, private sector, and representatives from federal and state agencies, took place in April 2007. The group chose an official name for this multi-state initiative - the Midwest Cover Crops Council (MCCC). The mission of MCCC is to improve the ecological and environmental functioning of the predominant annual cropping systems in the upper Mississippi and Great Lakes basins by growing cover crops on 30 percent of these acres within 15 years.



Dr. Margaret Adamek facilitates the MCCC in Minnesota as the group works to develop a strategic plan.

Project Goals

The overall goal is to achieve widespread adoption of cover crops throughout the Midwest. Specific goals include:

- establish federally and state-based farmer incentive programs across the region to serve as models that include energy, carbon, and nutrient management credits;
- develop new environmental criteria for biomass crops, including an increase in cover crops as part of state energy policies;
- secure funding to support pilot studies in major ecozones that will help quantify the environmental and economic benefits of cover crops;
- conduct germplasm development research

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- develop cover crop systems that fit a variety of niches within annual row crop systems;
- enhance public awareness and support for cover crops;
- develop policy incentives and programs to increase farmer adoption of cover crops in the region; and
- provide education and training to farmers and agencies at regional and local levels to help them understand and adopt cover crops management practices.

Outcomes

The Council has identified five major priority areas under which a series of activities and initiatives over five years will be undertaken to fulfill the overall goal of increasing cover crops adoption in the Great Lakes/Upper Midwest region. These priorities include policy, communications, research, education/outreach, and fund raising. Members of the

Council's network have developed five-year action plans in each of these areas.

To date, MCCC has:

- successfully completed a strategic plan
- leveraged more than \$50,000
- submitted a proposal to the USDA-National Research Initiative grant program
- received full financial support for a proposal submitted to the Natural Resources Institute
- submitted a letter of inquiry to the Packard Foundation with a budget of \$5.35 million
- held 20 conference calls during 2007
- planned a third annual meeting for March 2008 in Indianapolis



During the strategic planning process, small groups gather to develop a mission, vision and values.



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