

MCCC Annual Report:

1. Utilities Work
2. Cover Crop Champions
3. Crop Insurance

Utilities Work

NWF has begun to engage municipal water utilities in its larger agriculture work. Staff is working to link farmers with nearby utilities to help spread the message about the benefits to area water quality through conservation practices, and specifically cover crops. The objective is to get utilities and the agriculture community working together to improve source water and address nutrient pollution problems on a watershed scale. NWF will work with the utility and local stakeholder groups to initiate good relationships with farmers and facilitate open communication. We are using and adapting the lessons learned through the Cover Crop Champions program on messaging and culture change to teach utility operators to be more effective communicators.

The program is just getting started and we are hoping to work in depth with two to three utilities in the first cycle. A partnership is already underway with the City of Fond du Lac Wisconsin, which serves just under 50,000 people and is located in a predominantly agricultural area. Staff is also working to develop partnerships in Iowa and Indiana.

Cover Crop Champions

2017 is the fifth year of the Cover Crop Champion program. The Champions are cover crop leaders who provide region-specific information and farming knowledge to farmers and crop advisors. Financial and technical support from NWF allows Champions to travel around their state to discuss the multiple benefits of cover crop implementation. Training consists of a webinar series as well as an in person communications training to equip the Champions to spread their message more effectively. This year the program has 25 individual champions who work across 6 states.

The program is currently limited to the Upper Mississippi River Basin due to funding priorities. Staff is working on obtaining additional funding, which would allow the program to expand to Great Lakes, Plains and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Crop Insurance

Problems continue to exist regarding the intersection between cover crop use and crop insurance eligibility. In the past year I have heard from farmers in Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Iowa and Ohio about their crop insurance or cover crop use getting limited due to existing rules. NWF has led a number of meetings in Washington as an attempt to build consensus within the conservation, agriculture, and commodity communities around solving these issues. The problems are four-fold:

1. The cover crop rules are tied to eligibility, unlike any other agronomic practice. Additionally, by creating specific rules, there is no possibility for evolution in best practices.
2. Crop insurance companies are not adhering to this rule and are in fact implementing more stringent rules.

3. Differing rules and differing interpretations by crop insurance companies have created uncertainty for farmers that, until resolved, prevents a significant portion of farmers from adopting cover crops.
4. RMA bureaucratic staff are hesitant to change their stance on the cover crop rules. They believe these rules are necessary to prevent any additional risk. For them, practices that were around before crop insurance took off in the 1990s are effectively grandfathered while cover crops deserve additional scrutiny.