

OPINION



Watch water use by cereal rye in the spring to ensure decent moisture at planting. (Abbey Wick/NDSU Extension Soil Health)

Soil Health Minute: Managing cereal rye in the spring

By **Abbey Wick**, NDSU Soil Health on May 12, 2019 at 7:30 a.m.

Cereal rye can be an excellent cover crop in the Northern Plains, primarily for the spring growth, but it needs to be managed effectively. Here are a few reminders on management.

Eye on the rye

Having something growing in the spring to managing moisture is an excellent tool, but like all tools, it needs to be used properly. I recommend keeping any eye on the rye fields by occasionally walking into them and sticking a shovel or even your finger into the ground to check for moisture in the seedbed. Monitoring can be especially important for sandier soils. If the rye is drying the soil out too much and there isn't a reliable rain in the forecast, then termination should be considered. The worst case scenario is when the rye dries out the seedbed, the crop is planted into dry soil, the furrow doesn't close well, the field does not get a shot of rain after planting resulting in a poor stand and the crop possibly being a growth stage behind all season. In our short growing season, we can't afford that. This can be avoided by terminating rye with a full rate of herbicide if the soil is getting too dry. Go with your gut feeling on this one.

Choose your crop wisely

We know that soybean into a living cereal rye works well (when managed correctly for moisture conditions, like stated above). We also know that corn into a living cereal rye is a bad idea. The allelopathic effect of rye is often the focus, but in talking with colleagues across the country, nitrogen tie up is even more of a concern for all of us. Cereal rye has been



Check soil moisture in fields with cereal rye this spring by digging with a shovel or even sticking your finger in the ground.

using nitrogen the prior fall and during its spring growth. That nitrogen taken up by the rye will likely not be released during the growing season. Competition is another big concern for me when planting corn into cereal rye. I recommend you do what the research tells you to do, terminate the cereal rye 10-14 days in advance of planting corn. We don't know much about canola, sunflower or other crops in to cereal rye. This is where terminating rye in the whole field but leaving a check strip where the crop is planted into a living rye provides a learning opportunity. But, don't risk the whole field on that learning opportunity.

Rye as a crop — why not?

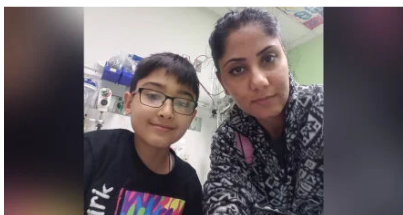
With a possible tight planting window this spring, it may be worth it to have the cereal rye cover crop fields left to be taken as a crop. Not sure what this means for insurance or discussions with bankers, you decide that, but if the stand looks good (even on part of a field) and you know you are going to seed more cereal rye this coming fall, consider keeping it. There is a North Dakota State University Extension article (NDSU Offers Rye Management Advice) being circulated about this with recommendations for fertilization, disease management and stand amongst other tips.

(<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/newsreleases/2019/april-29-2019/ndsu-extens..>

(<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/newsreleases/2019/april-29-2019/ndsu-extension-offers-rye-management-advice/view>))

With all cover crop use, going with your gut feeling is usually a good idea. Recognize your comfort level with the practices you are using and stick with it. More information can be found on the NDSU Soil Health webpage ([ndsu.edu/soilhealth](https://www.ndsu.edu/soilhealth)) or by following me on Twitter (@NDSUsoilhealth).

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