



Strategic Plan 2021-24

Since the Midwest Cover Crops Council first formed in 2006, a diverse group of academics, farmers, federal and state agency representatives, non-governmental organizations, commodity interests, and the private sector has worked to restore a year-round living cover on the Midwest landscape. This regional collaboration of 13 states and provinces in the upper Midwest has encouraged research about cover crops, developed a strong network of organizations interested in cover crops adoption, and created education tools and resources to help farmers understand how cover crops can benefit both their production and the environment.

While regional adoption of cover crops has grown over the past 14 years, the MCCC board is determined to go further. In 2020, the board assessed progress to date and developed this strategic plan to guide the organization for the future. In five “listening sessions” with network partners during the Fall, MCCC posed the question, ***“What can MCCC do to help facilitate widespread adoption of cover crops?”*** The partners universally praised MCCC’s current work, and offered suggestions that have informed the plan on the following pages.

After the listening sessions, the entire board participated in a half-day retreat to discuss broad directions for the future. The Executive Committee further refined the plan to include restated mission and vision statements, along with goals, strategies, and metrics focused on three key areas:

education, network growth, and collective impact.

Targeted communications focused on the information needs of diverse stakeholders, increased data-gathering and assessment capabilities, and a more prominent role in policy efforts are the major initiatives that MCCC will focus on over the next four years. Ultimately, the board expects these actions to increase the adoption of cover crops regionally.

The board adopted this plan December 11, 2020.



Strategic Plan 2021-24

MISSION:

The mission of the Midwest Cover Crops Council is to facilitate widespread adoption of cover crops across the Midwest.

We empower a network of producers, landowners, researchers, industry, agencies, Extension, and government stakeholders to increase cover crop adoption by creating education/outreach programs, decision tools, and science-based materials, providing technical expertise to inform better policy, and promoting new research on cover crops in the Midwest region.

VISION:

Increased cover crop adoption will lead to improved economic viability of agriculture, improved soil and water quality, and greater resilience of agricultural systems across the Midwest.

Goal 1: Education

Educate a diverse network of stakeholders about the management and benefits of cover crops.

Key Strategies:

- Continue to create, update, and distribute informative science-based materials and resources (e.g. cover crop selector tool, pocket guide, videos) tailored to the needs of different types of producers.
- Tailor MCCC materials, messages, and media selection to appeal to the distinct needs and interests of different audiences (e.g. non-farming landowners, farm managers, producers, crop advisors, retail agronomists, etc.) *Implementation will require additional funding for marketing expertise.*
- Quantify and broadly share the economic risks and benefits of using cover crops. *Implementation will require additional funding for data-gathering.*

- Continue educating stakeholders about the environmental benefits of cover crops.
- Create customizable templates and a train-the-trainer program for training agronomists and crop advisors.
- Develop a process for tracking cover crops adoption for individual states and provinces, and a means for tracking it annually. *Implementation will require additional funding.*

Measurable Outcomes:

- *Website and decision tool use increases 10% annually (from 2020 baseline).*
- *A consistent process and tracking mechanism for regional adoption will be defined by 2024.*

Goal 2: Network Growth

Expand the network of advocates who support and promote cover crops as a best management practice.

Key Strategies:

- Involve innovative producer-led groups who are cover crop advocates.
- Develop decision tools and case studies to help retail agronomists and crop advisors become more comfortable about selling cover crop services and better understanding the value of building it into their business plans. *Implementation will require additional funding for case study development.*
- Share materials created for Extension and agency staff more broadly (to NRCS, SWCD, seed companies, etc.).
- Engage network partners in ongoing discussions to provide input and feedback about MCCC activities.
- Partner with other organizations and groups to share cover crop information with niche audiences (e.g. non-farming landowners.)

Measurable Outcomes:

- *MCCC social media engagement increases 20% annually (from 2020 baseline).*
- *Listserv subscribers grows by 10% by 2024 (from 2020 baseline).*
- *MCCC hosts one input session (with one to three network partners) per quarter.*
- *Links and connectivity to other cover crops websites are updated annually.*

Goal 3: Collective Impact

Facilitate networking and collaboration for research across states, sharing data to strengthen education and/or change policy.

Key Strategies:

- Enhance networking time for research discussions at the annual meeting.
- Actively invite researchers with broader interests and/or from other regions to the MCCC annual meeting.
- Gather and provide data to network partners to expand their knowledge about cover crops, focusing on key policy areas (e.g. NRCS/RMA termination guidelines, crop insurance, environmentally friendly practices, early inter-seeding, etc.)
- Build coalitions with groups involved in farm bill reform to inform policy decisions about cover crops adoption.
- Continue to strengthen the MCCC board, seeking cover crops advocates from across the network who bring needed expertise, including in new emphasis areas such as public policy and marketing.
- Seek additional funding to implement new initiatives and sustain the organization.

Measurable Outcomes:

- *Regional adoption of cover crops reaches at least 5% in the 2022 Ag census (up from 4% in 2017 census).*
- *At least \$100,000 of new funding secured to implement key initiatives in this plan.*