

Crop Production

Farmers join nat'l study on cover crops

Key Points

- Conservation Tillage Information Center is conducting a cover crop project.
- Ray McKenzie is one of three Michigan farmers involved in \$1 million project.
- Objective: quantify covers' economic, agronomic and environmental impacts.

By JENNIFER VINCENT KIEL

RAY McKenzie is looking to build organic matter and control erosion on the 900 acres he farms in Marcellus. This year, for the first time, he's turning to cover crops. "I'm watching the soil profiles and ours is really good — loaded with earthworms," he says. "But I still want to build more organic matter, enhance and improve the soils, and I don't think I can do it without a cover crop."

McKenzie is one of three Michigan farmers involved in the Conservation Tillage Information Center's \$1.07 million project to examine the economic, agronomic and environmental benefits of

cover crops. The other farmers involved in the project include Jeff Stuck, also of Marcellus, and Tim Stutzman of Morenci. (Look for more on them in coming issues).

The seven-state project is made possible by a Conservation Innovation Grant awarded by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

CITC has partnered with Penton Farm Progress publications and the National Corn Growers Association to work with growers in seven states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and South Dakota.

CITC (a nonprofit organization) and partners have set these objectives for the project:

- plant at least 1,000 new acres of cover crops
- learn how producer experience plays a role in cover crop successes and challenges
- analyze costs of cover crops in new

and established systems

- estimate the amount of nitrogen secured by cover crops for the following crop

- document the benefits of cover crops as forage and nutritional sources for pollinators

Ultimately, CITC's goal is to help USDA reach 20 million acres of cover crops by 2020, currently estimated at 3 million.

McKenzie farms with son-in-law Peter Steinkraus, planting 65% of their 900 acres to corn and the rest soybeans, while contract-finishing about 20,000 hogs.

The farm is 100% no-till and has been for the last 25 years, McKenzie explains. The soils are a mix of gravel, sand, and Oshtemo loam.

This year he planted 90 acres of annual ryegrass with brassica mixed in following soybeans. It was aerial-seeded Aug. 25. On another 105 acres he broadcast-seeded cereal rye, which was then rolled Oct. 25 following soybeans. "I consulted

with Colleen Forestieri [Michigan State University Extension adviser] and used her recommendations on what to plant," McKenzie says.

Estimated total costs per acre were \$31 for the aerial seeding and \$24 for the cereal rye.

McKenzie does use his manure and applied it to the cover crops at three different rates. "It didn't hurt it at all. I'm excited about our nitrogen, and I think this is really going to enhance our program. The rye looked like a lawn this fall," McKenzie says. "It's unbelievable how good and solid it looks. The cereal was planted so late, and because it got cold quick, I didn't think it was going to work. However, the breaks we had in December, I could see a green hue. It looks like we're going to have some good stands. I'm very optimistic at this point."

Funding partners in the project include Monsanto, Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, The Nature Conservancy, Purdue University, DuPont Pioneer and the CropLife Foundation.

For more information on cover crops, visit ctic.org/CoverCrops.



RAY MCKENZIE



Funding allocated to help veterans, minority farmers

USDA Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden announced the availability of over \$9 million in outreach and technical assistance for minority farmers and ranchers, and military veterans that are new to farming and ranching.

This funding will enable community-based organizations, eligible higher-education institutions and tribal organizations to work directly with these groups to successfully acquire, own and operate farms and ranches and to access all USDA programs and services. These funds are being provided through the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program, also known as the "2501 Program."

Through the 2501 Program, outreach and technical assistance is provided to mi-

Key Points

- Program seeks to help minorities and veterans own and operate farms.
- Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center created.
- To date, the program has distributed more than \$66 million.

nority and veteran farmers and ranchers through partnering organizations, including 1890 Land Grant Institutions, 1994 Land Grant Institutions, other American Indian Tribal community colleges and Alaska Native cooperative colleges, Hispanic-serving and other institutions of higher education, tribal governments and organizations, and community-based organizations.

"To stay competitive, America's farmers and ranchers must be diverse in experience, background and skills, says Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden. Every farmer and rancher has something to contribute to America's agriculture. Community partnerships can help farmers and ranchers reach their full potential," "As we celebrate the first anniversary of the 2014 Farm Bill, programs like these are evidence that an investment in all of America's farmers and ranchers is an investment in our future."

Applications for the 2501 program must be submitted through grants.gov. More information about the 2501 Program, including forthcoming grant notice and application deadlines is at outreach.usda.gov/grants/index.htm.

The Deputy Secretary also announced

the formation of a Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center dedicated to collecting and analyzing data, developing policy recommendations, and evaluating policy concerning socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers including minorities, veterans, and Native Americans. This one-time competitive program is open to any eligible 1890 Land-Grant Institution interested in hosting the Center.

Since 2010, the 2501 Program has distributed more than \$66 million to 250 partners. The program is administered by the USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach. The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorized the program and expanded assistance to include military veterans.

For more, visit usda.gov/farmbill.

Source: USDA