



**Conservation Technology
Information Center**



**american
seed trade
association**

NATIONAL COVER CROP SURVEY REPORT



SEPTEMBER 2026

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ABSTRACT

The 2026 National Cover Crop Survey from the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), U.S. Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, and the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) gathered insights from 657 American farmers from 46 states and Puerto Rico. Respondents produced commodity crops, livestock, and specialty/horticultural crops. Sixty-eight percent planted cover crops in 2025, 16.3% said they used cover crops some years, 7.9% formerly used cover crops, and 7.6% never employed the practice. Among the current cover crop users, half reported 10 years or more of experience with cover crops.

Despite a challenging 2025 growing season and significant uncertainty in commodity markets, respondents reported steady growth in cover crop acreage. The average acreage planted to cover crop by users in the survey reached 397.9 in 2025 and was projected to cross the 400-acre barrier to reach 415.7 in 2026.



Photo: Gregg Sanford & CIAS, UW-Madison

Cover crops contributed to a mean increase of 3.5 bushels per acre in corn and a mean improvement in soybean yields of 1.4 bushels per acre in 2025 among cover crop users in the survey. Weed control was also improved by cover crops—31.2% of cover crop users reported a savings on herbicide costs following cover crops, and 87% of the growers who planted green reported better weed control.

1 IN 3 COVER CROP USERS GRAZED COVERS OR CUT THEM FOR FORAGE

This year's survey—the ninth in a series dating back to 2012—took special care to regard respondents not as a binary user/non-user audience, but as systems-oriented growers considering every season whether to use covers or refrain from them based on physical and economic conditions. Among the survey's cover crop users, 60.8% said they sometimes did not use cover crops on certain fields, and three out of four non-users indicated that they were open to trying the practice. Most previous cover crop users said they stopped planting cover crops due to economics, lack of moisture, concerns about the impact on cash crops, or logistics.

Both cover crop users and former users were presented with questions exploring incentive programs. Understanding how they use incentives and how they experienced the process of applying and participating in programs could provide important guidance in creating more attractive programs that inspire growers to continue using covers after the checks stop arriving. Offering programs that last long enough for participants to hone their cover-crop management techniques, see the benefits of the practice, and allow enough management flexibility to permit grazing and other tactics, appears to be the key to success. It is interesting to note that 43.7% of cover crop users did not receive incentives in 2025, and just 21.6% of previous users participated in incentive programs.

The 2026 National Cover Crop Survey also dug more deeply than before into two emerging elements of cover crop use: grazing cover crops and employing drones in seeding and management.

One in three of the survey's cover crop users reported that they grazed cover crops or harvested them to feed livestock. The large majority of graziers—84.8%—owned their own livestock, while others had arrangements with neighbors or livestock producers. Among producers who grazed their cover crops, 77% said it improved their profitability. Grazing cover crops has outstanding potential for growth, especially if virtual fencing can be employed to cost-effectively manage herds, and if producers can get help developing water infrastructure to service the animals.

So far, 16.3% of cover crop users reported working with drones in their cover crops. Though that is modest percent of overall users, it represents a surge of interest in drones. Respondents to this year's survey indicate that unmanned aerial vehicles are increasingly on their radar and are likely to play a growing role in cover crop seeding and management.

CITATION: Conservation Technology Information Center, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education & American Seed Trade Association, 2026. Report of the 2026 National Cover Crop Survey. [Link to the publication.](#)



FOREWORD

The 2026 National Cover Crop Survey from the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), U.S. Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, and the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) comes at a critical moment in America's conservation history: We are facing our own Dust Bowl moment, and cover crops can and should play a bigger role in helping our nation's farmers avert another disaster.

Dust advisories crowd the airwaves, and social media is buffeted by videos of clouds of precious topsoil blowing across bare fields. This spring, farmers in Montana recorded themselves blocking window sills with towels. If the footage was in black and white, most of us would easily assume it was taken during the Dirty '30s.

In 1935, Hugh Hammond Bennett inspired Congress to fund the new USDA Soil Conservation Service. He gathered the science and dispatched a corps of conservationists across the heartland to stop the bleeding and put American agriculture on the road to recovery. Since those early days, millions of farmers have adopted no-till and conservation tillage, terraces and contours, buffer strips and bioreactors ... and cover crops. Funds and incentives for conservation are a regular part of the Farm Bill and the national conversation.

We now have the ability to track cover crop adoption using sophisticated data collection tools. We can seed and manage cover crops with an ever-expanding fleet that now includes drones. We have thousands of acres of test plots annually for various species of cover crops and management practices, and hundreds of advisors eager to share their experience with cover crops.

But as much as we know today and as much as we talk about conservation in agriculture, we're not doing enough.

Cover crops protected more than 17 million acres of U.S. farm ground in 2022, the year of the latest USDA Census of Agriculture. As impressive as that figure is, it leaves well over a hundred million acres of cropland in various states of vulnerability to erosion and off-farm nutrient loss.

I know from experience on our family farm that cover crops add to the list of chores I have to do in a season, and that they require an investment of money and time. Over the years, I have seen that investment pay off in erosion control, vital moisture in dry years, and healthier soil.

This National Cover Crop Survey Report reveals what other farmers see when they look at cover crops. Since 2012, this program has gathered farmers' perspectives on adopting cover crops—their hopes and concerns, their assumptions on costs and benefits, and their thoughts on programs and incentives. Guided by that insight and supported by data on the benefits of cover crops, we can make an ever-stronger case for cover crops as an investment in America's farming future.

We must learn these lessons quickly. If Hugh Hammond Bennett were here today, checking his Instagram feed, I am afraid he would be appalled at what more of us aren't doing to protect our farmland... despite how much more we know now than we did when he was building the foundation of sustainable farming in the U.S.



RYAN HEINIGER

Executive Director

Conservation Technology Information Center

INTRODUCTION

Participants in the 2026 National Cover Crop Survey found themselves between a tumultuous 2025 harvest and an uncertain 2026. Low commodity prices, questions about export markets roiled by trade uncertainties, and escalating input prices spurred by high tariffs and military conflict in Iran narrowed margins and soured outlooks.

Despite large swaths of drought in the Midwest and West and excessive rain in the South and Northeast, yields were fairly good for many growers, and Washington provided financial support aimed largely at commodity growers.

Within the conservation agriculture space in 2025, clawbacks of government grants and questions about the future of climate-related conservation programs added to the uncertainty.

In all, it was a challenging year for farmers considering cover crops, particularly those who thought of them as a cost rather than as an investment in productivity, soil health, weed control, and farm stability. With that in mind, the enthusiasm of hundreds of cover crop users who participated in the March 2026 survey, and the generosity of hundreds of non-users and former users in explaining their thoughts on cover crops, was inspiring.

From their experience, this report explores attitudes toward cover crops. It dives deeper than previous reports in this series—which began in 2012—into grazing livestock on cover crops and grower experience in incentive programs.

The hope of the survey team—the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), U.S. Department of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, and the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA)—is to shed light on pathways to provide growers with insights on how and where cover crops can benefit them and help them obtain maximum benefit from the practice.

A key element in this year's survey is exploring the role of financial incentive programs that promote cover crops and learning what makes the best programs successful. Academic research points to the importance of incentive programs that go beyond treating target practices in isolation. As Hunt et al. (2026) wrote in *Agriculture and Human Values*, farmers evaluate synergies and systems, not single tools. Such complementary thinking is on display when farmers complain about programs that permit one narrow approach to a practice like cover crops while prohibiting tactics that allow them to integrate them into a complex, biological system—for instance, paying for cover crops that produce but limiting their use in grazing.

Another element of this year's survey is considering cover crop use as a continually evolving practice in which users might curtail the practice in particular times or places, and non-users might resume cover crops where they fit their operations. With that flexibility in mind, this report presents a look into grower attitudes we hope will help put cover crops on millions more acres of American farmland in ways that provide great benefit to farmers, livestock, and the general public.



METHOD

The ninth SARE/CTIC/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey was conducted online between March 12 and April 4, 2026. A Qualtrics survey form included a total of 113 questions divided among various types of respondents, soliciting yes/no, multiple-choice, Likert scale slider bars, guided choice, and open-response answers. Farmers answered only the questions relevant to their situation and experience, based on branching options within the survey.

The survey was developed by a committee representing SARE, the University of Missouri Center for Regenerative Agriculture, CTIC, and ASTA.

The survey was publicized through a press release and social media posts from SARE, CTIC, and ASTA. Email blasts of the press release content were also issued by SARE, CTIC, and ASTA to their contact lists, and it was shared by agriculture media outlets and industry associations.

Bethany Bedeker of the University of Missouri coordinated the survey instrument design and implementation, fine-tuned the wording, collected and validated the responses, and analyzed the data. This project is a direct result of her diligent work and dedication.

As Dr. Rob Myers leaves his long-time role at the head of North Central Region-SARE, we thank him for developing this survey series and guiding the process with curiosity and wisdom.

Due to the nature of the contact lists and the geographic reach of the survey organizers, the respondent pool leans toward Midwestern producers with a stronger-than-average bent toward conservation farming practices than the general U.S. farm population.



Respondents qualified by self-identifying into “commodity, livestock, or specialty” producer categories. Respondents whose selection did not include a producer category were led to a “thank you” message and exit. Those who identified with one of the producer categories were divided among tracks for cover crop users, former users, and non-users based on their answer to a question on their cover crop history.

This year’s survey differentiated among non-users who have never planted cover crops and former users. Among the new insights the team sought this year were intermittent use, partial adoption, or discontinued use of cover crops. The factors contributing to annual variability could create a more nuanced understanding of farm operations for policymakers, conservation advocates, agribusinesses, and crop consultants.

The 2026 survey also included new questions on grazing cover crops, including challenges respondents faced in integrating grazed livestock into their cover crop system and the impact of grazing cover crops on livestock rate of gain. New questions on incentives could help policymakers improve programs to engage cover crop users and reward them for the benefits they deliver.

As with the other National Cover Crop Surveys conducted by SARE, CTIC, and ASTA, the 2026 data cannot be statistically correlated between previous surveys, as the respondent pool and questions were not identical from one year to the next. However, the research team is comfortable examining broad trends among the surveys dating back to 2012.

Not all users answered every question in their track, so data in this report includes an “n” value indicating the number of respondents for each question. Several questions allowed respondents to choose more than one answer, so total percentages for those graphs could exceed 100%.

The data was validated to help ensure it was not the product of automated responder “bots.” In the data on corn yields, a couple of significant outliers were removed from the data set by the project’s data analyst. A small number of respondents identified themselves as “growers” with less than one acre of cropland, which could indicate horticulture crop producers or participants curious to go through the survey process.

All data was collected anonymously, but respondents were offered the option of submitting their email address for more information on cover crops from CTIC. Respondents who completed the survey could also enter a randomized drawing for one of three \$100 Visa gift cards, which were awarded soon after the survey period was closed.

For more information on this project and the eight previous SARE/CTIC/ASTA National Cover Crop Surveys, visit <https://ctic.org/national-cover-crop-survey/>.

RESPONDENTS

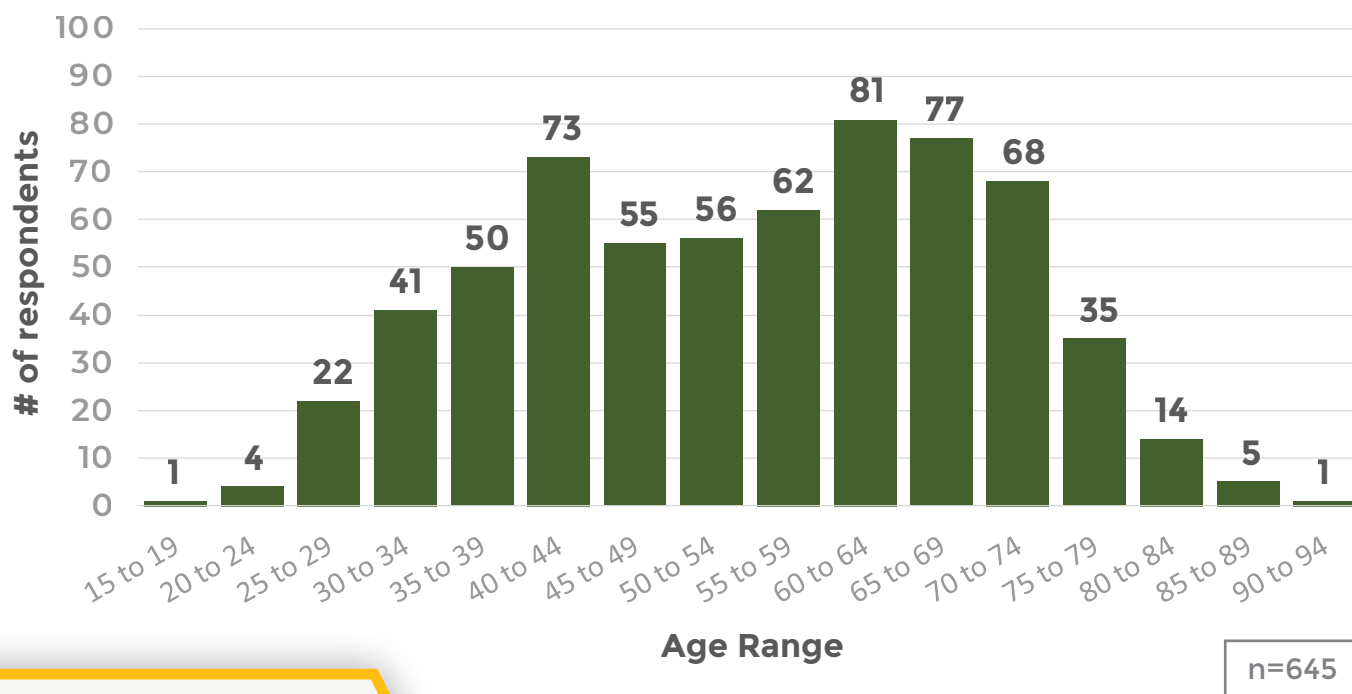
The 2026 SARE/CTIC/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey collected 657 farmer responses. Of those, 120 were deemed incomplete two weeks after the close of the survey period, leaving 533 completed submissions. Both incomplete and completed surveys were analyzed, as the survey developers decided the incomplete surveys did not invalidate the data that was provided.

- AGE -

The median age of this year's respondents was 55 years old, which is four years younger than the participants in the 2023 SARE/CTIC/ASTA survey, the last study focusing on farmers. (The 2024-2025 survey focused on advisors.) The median age of respondents in the 2026 survey is also lower than the national average, which was 58.1 years in the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture.

The largest group of respondents—81, or 12.6% of the 645 participants who answered the question—were age 60-to-64, followed by 77 (11.9%) who were 65 to 69, 73 (11.3%) in the 40-to-44 category, and 68 (10.5%) reporting their age at 70 to 74. A total of 68 (10.5%) were under the age of 35, and 6 (0.9%) were 85 or older.

RESPONDENT AGE

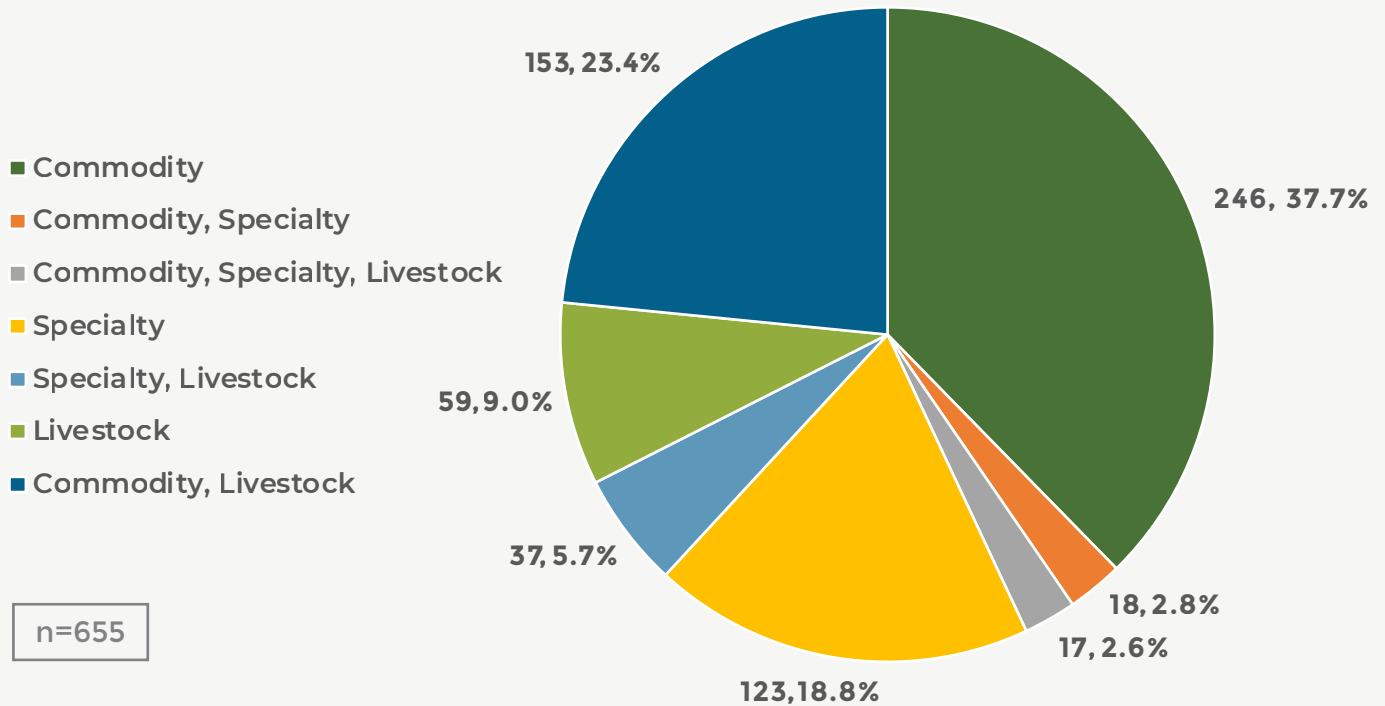


- CROPS -

A total of 655 responses were analyzed; 246 (37.5%) described themselves as commodity growers—defined in the question as a producer of “corn, soybean, wheat, cotton, sorghum, etc.”—and 153 (23.4%) described themselves as producers of both commodity crops and livestock. Nearly 19%, or 123 respondents, reported they grow horticultural or vegetable crops; 37 (5.6%) produce both horticultural crops and livestock; 18 (2.7%) produce both commodity and horticultural/specialty crops; and 17 (2.6%) combine commodity and horticultural crops with livestock. An additional 59 (9.0%) reported producing only livestock.

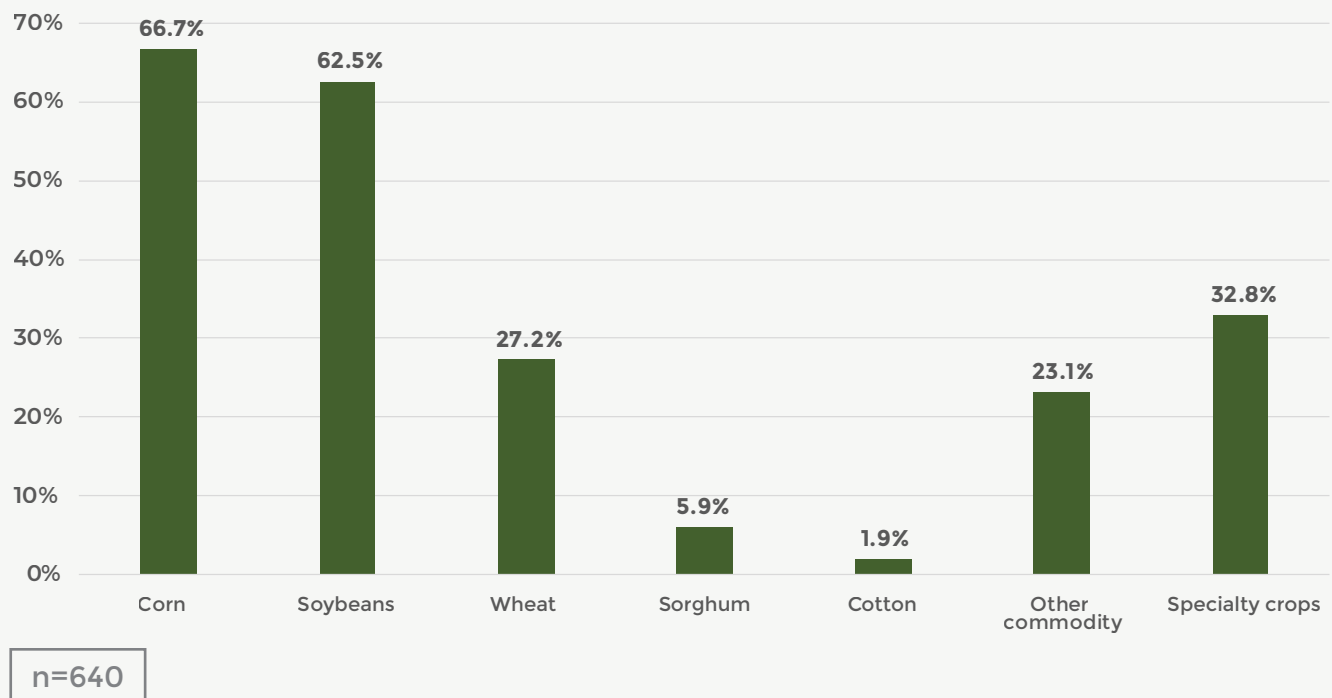
- CROPS (CONTINUED) -

SELF-IDENTIFIED CATEGORY



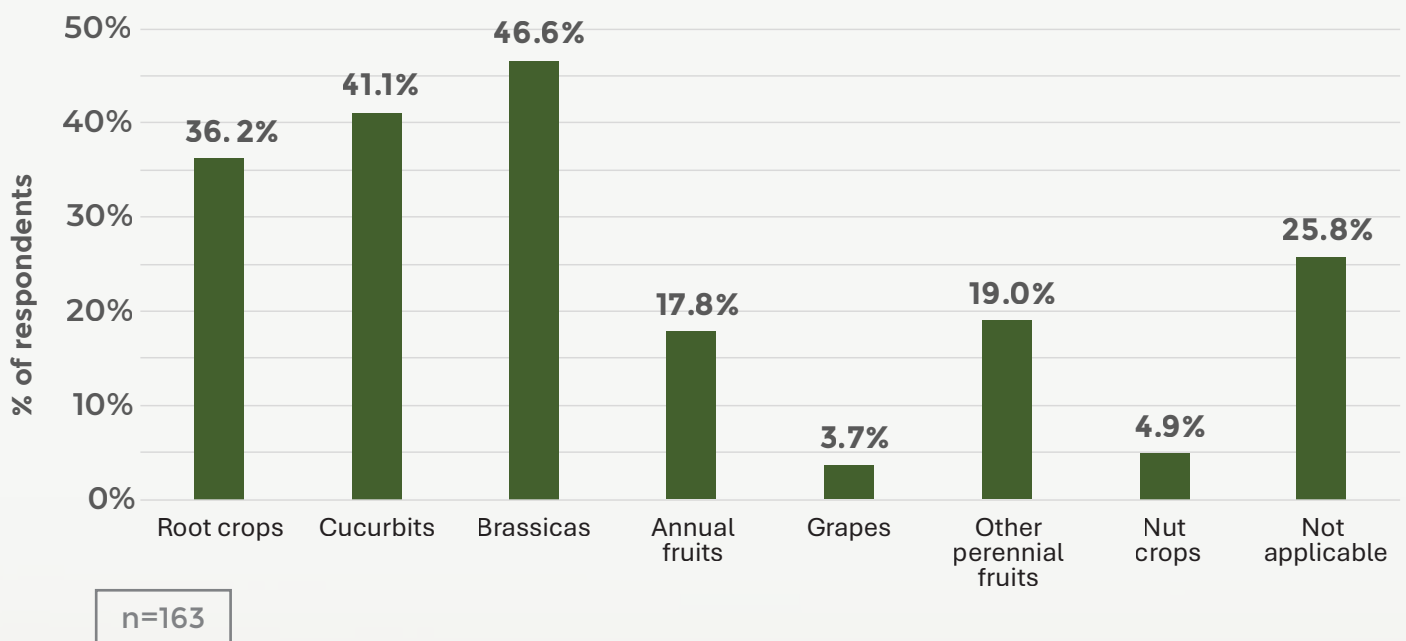
Asked to specify the crops they grew, 66.7% of 640 respondents said they produced corn, and 62.5% reported growing soybeans. Specialty crops—defined in the question as vegetables, fruits, nuts, or other non-commodity crops—were grown by 32.8% of the respondents, and 27.2% reported growing wheat. Sorghum was listed by 5.9% of the participants, while 1.9% grew cotton. Just over 23% selected “Other” and listed hay (33, or 5.6%), oats or alfalfa (32, or 5.0%, each), rye (22/3.4%), barley (3.3%), and a host of other crops ranging from sunflower to triticale to guayaba and cacao.

CROPS GROWN IN 2025



- CROPS (CONTINUED) -

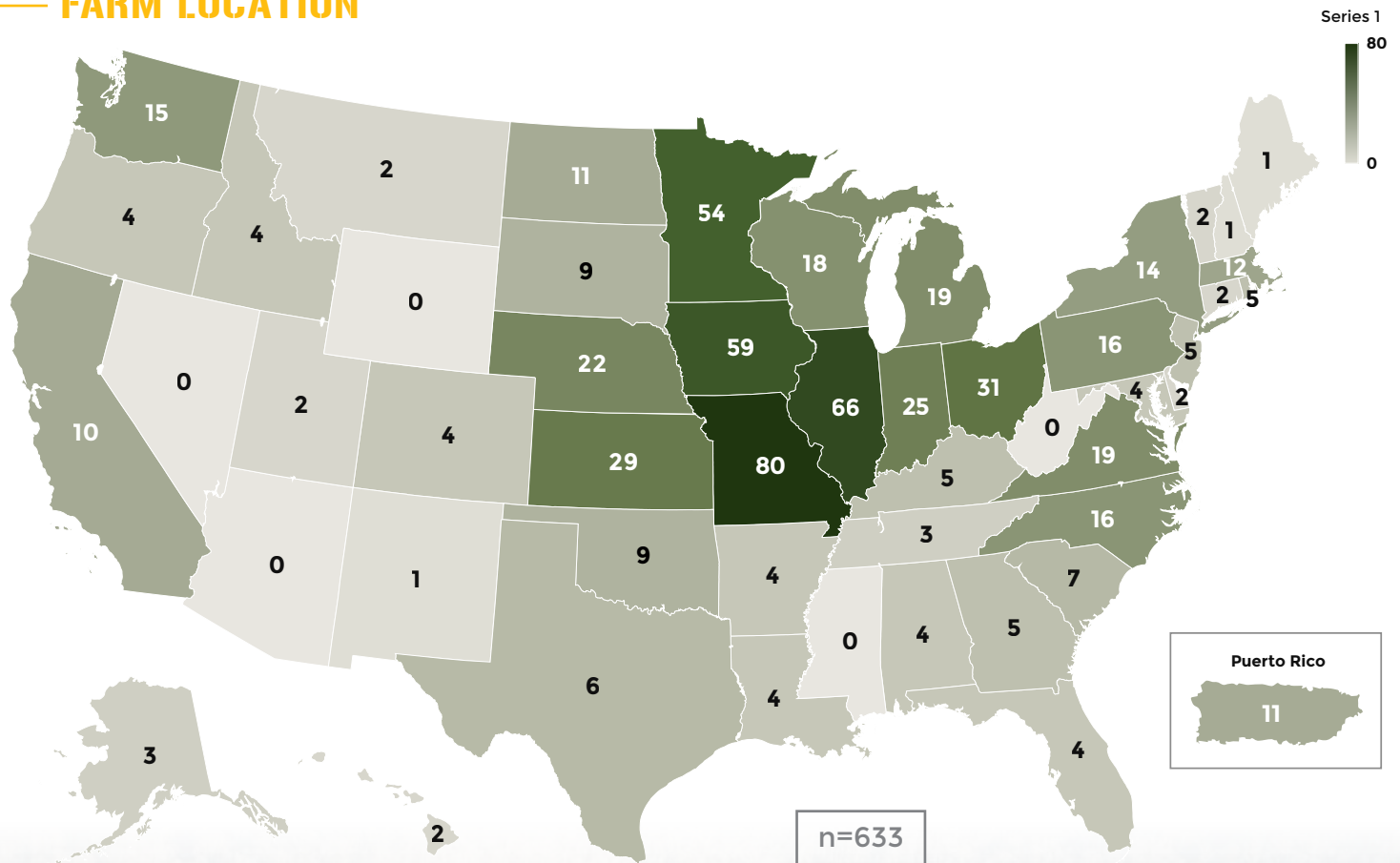
Among 163 respondents who said they grew specialty crops, 46.6% reported that brassicas (lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, and related crops) composed 10% or more of their income; cucurbits (like pumpkins, squash, cucumbers) contributed at least 10% of the income for 41.1% of the specialty crop growers. Vegetable root crops, including potatoes, carrots, turnips, and others) were noted by 36.2% of the specialty crop growers as a 10%-or-greater contributor to farm income. Perennial fruits other than grapes were identified by 19% of the group, while 17.8% produced annual fruits such as strawberries and melons. Nut crops were listed by 4.9% of the specialty crop growers, and grapes by 3.7%. One in four (25.8%) said they did not raise horticultural crops on a significant commercial basis.

SPECIALTY CROPS THAT PROVIDE AT LEAST 10% OF FARM INCOME

Respondents represented 46 states and Puerto Rico, with a significant majority located in the Midwest. Missouri growers led significantly, with 80 growers (12.6%) participating in the survey. Sixty-six Illinois farmers (10.4%) comprised the second-largest group of respondents by state, followed by 59 (9.3%) in Iowa and 54 (8.5%) in Minnesota. Ohio led the next cluster with 31 producers (4.9%), followed by Kansas with 29 (4.6%), Indiana with 25 (3.9%), and Nebraska with 22 (3.5%).

Other states with 10 or more participating producers included Michigan and Virginia (19 each), Wisconsin (18), North Carolina and Pennsylvania (16 each), Washington State (15), New York (14), Massachusetts (12), North Dakota and Puerto Rico (both 11), and California (10).

FARM LOCATION



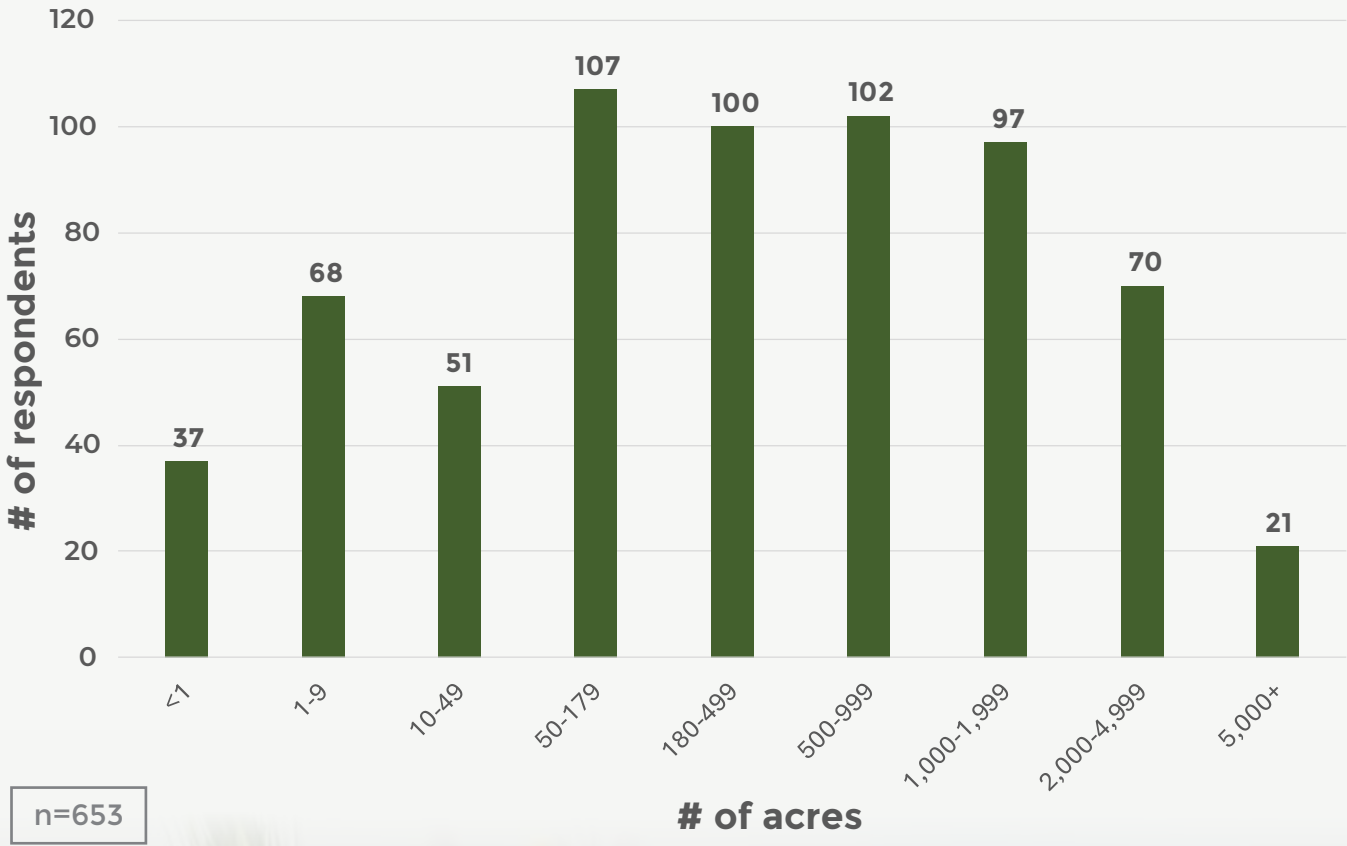
Powered by Bing
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- ACREAGE -

The 653 growers who shared their 2025 crop acreage data covered the entire range of sizes, from 37 (5.6%) in the less-than-one-acre bracket to 21 (3.2%) farming 5,000 acres or more. The largest group in an acreage category was 107 (16.4%) farming 50 to 179 acres, followed by 102 (15.6%) reporting 500 to 999 acres, 100 (15.3%) with 180 to 499 acres, and 97 (14.9%) producing on 1,000 to 1,999 acres.

An almost equal number fell on either side of the bulge in the curve, with 70 (10.7%) farming 2,000 to 4,999 acres and 68 (10.4%) in the one-to-nine-acre category. Finally, 51 growers reported producing on 10 to 49 acres.

ACRES FARMED IN 2025



- ACREAGE (CONTINUED) -

Because many specialty crop growers operate on smaller acreage than many commodity row crop producers do, the data team cross-tabulated acreage and products produced among cover crop users. It is important to note that percentages exceed 100 because respondents could choose as many products as they wanted (for instance, selecting commodity crops and grazed livestock).

Not surprisingly, commodity crop producers tended to dominate the larger-acreage categories, while most of the smaller-acre groups had higher percentages of horticultural or specialty crop producers. Livestock producers and ranchers were evenly distributed among the farm size categories.



Photo: Edwin Remsburg & USDA-SARE

ACRES FARMED BY SELF-IDENTIFIED CATEGORY



- ACREAGE (CONTINUED) -

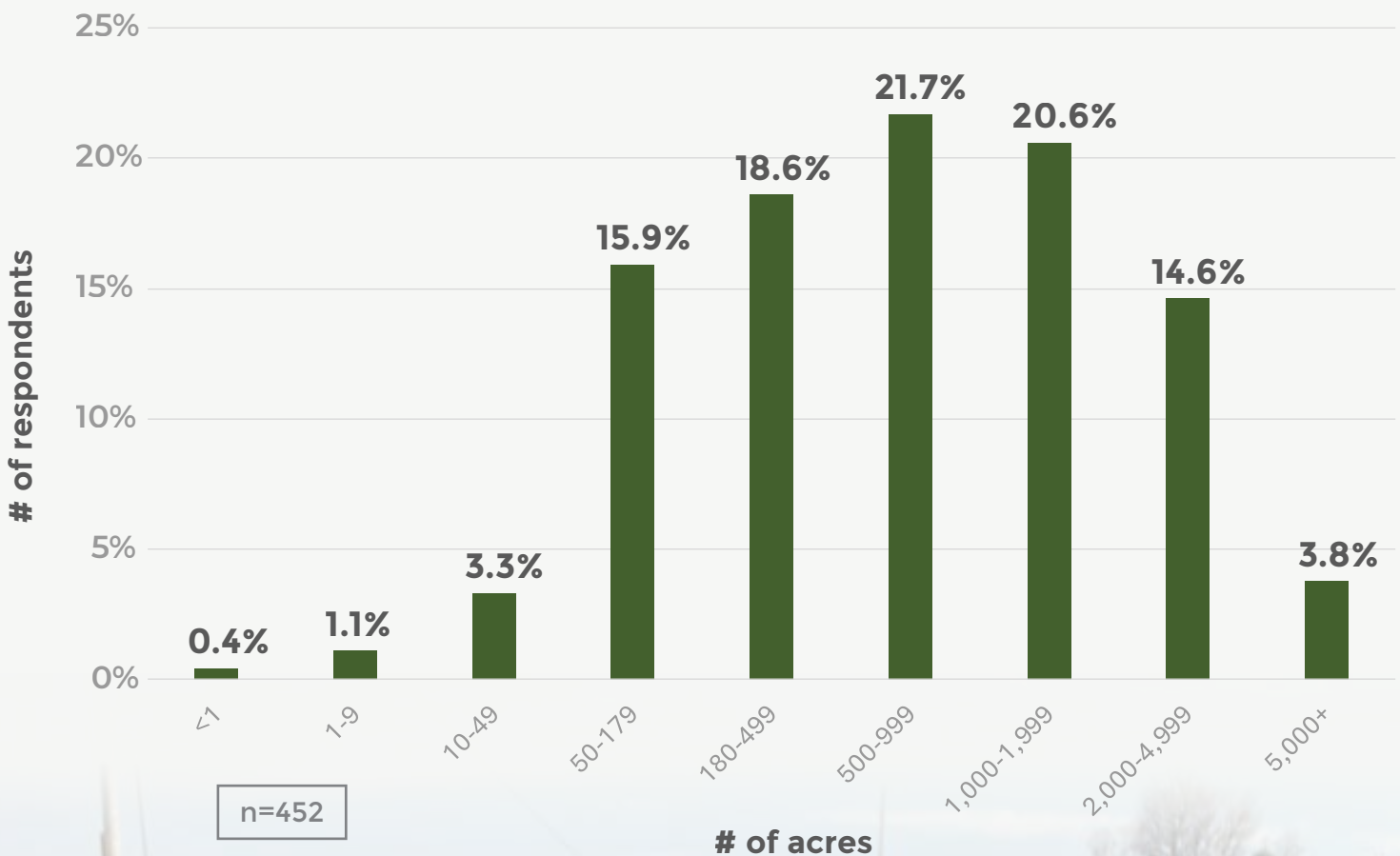
The data further drilled into farm size of corn/soybean growers, which skewed toward larger acreage.

Of the 452 respondents to the acreage question that reported growing corn and soybeans, the largest number—98 (21.7%)—reported farming 500 to 999 acres, while 93 (20.6%) farmed 1,000 to 1,999 acres in 2026, 84 (18.6%) produced on 180 to 499 acres, and 72 (15.9%) farmed 50 to 179 acres.

At the top of the range, 66 (14.6%) farmed 2,000 to 4,999 acres in 2025 and 17 (3.8%) in the 5,000-or-more-acre band. That top-acreage corn and soybean group represented eight in 10 of the 5,000-plus-acre growers in the survey.

On the small-acreage end, 15 (3.3%) of the corn and soybean farmers operated on 10 to 49 acres, five (1.1%) reported one to nine acres, and two (0.4%) claimed less than one acre.

ACRES FARMED IN 2025 BY CORN AND SOYBEAN PRODUCERS

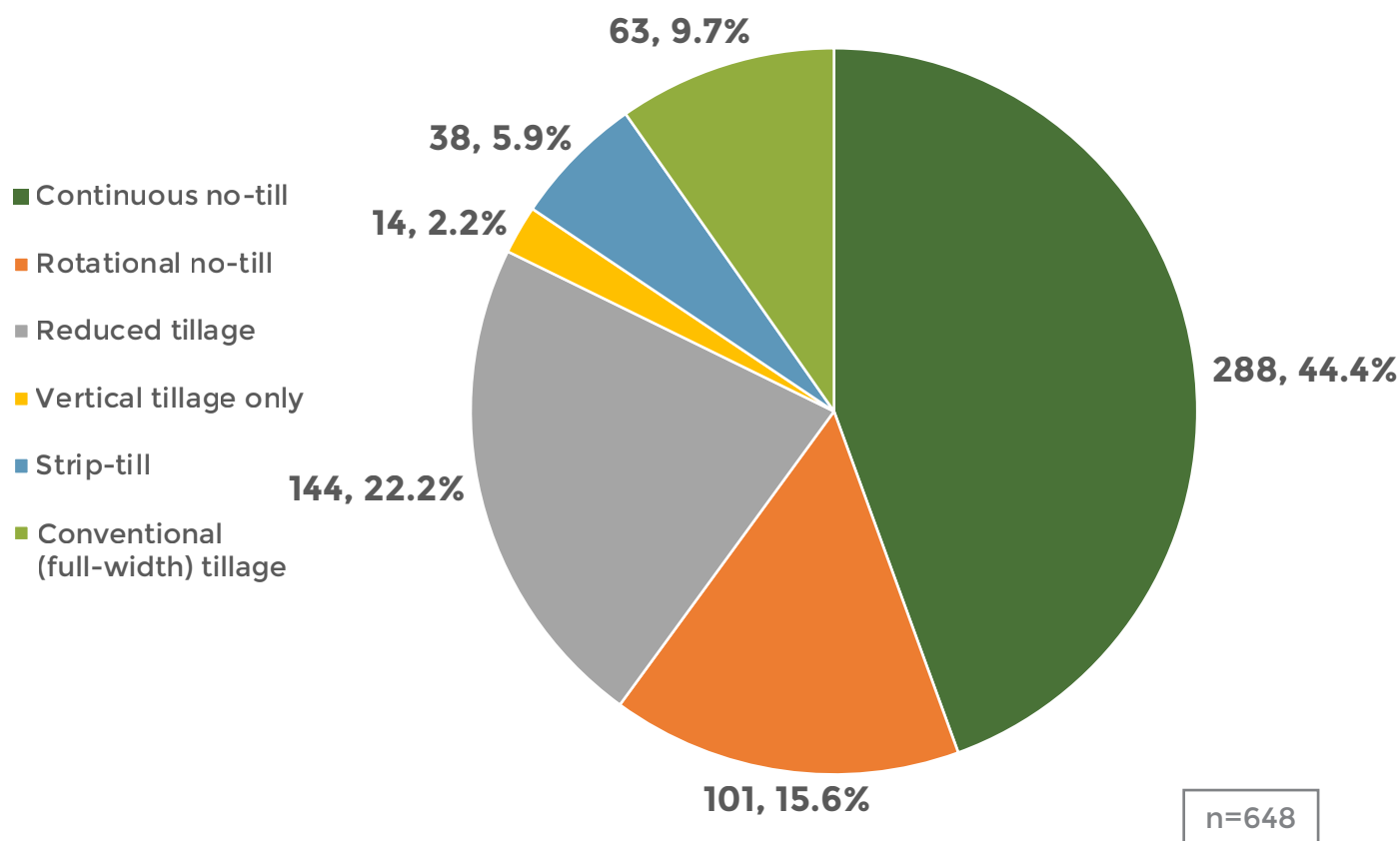


- NINE IN 10 RESPONDENTS PRACTICE SOME FORM OF CONSERVATION TILLAGE -

Respondents exhibited a strong bias for conservation farming. The largest group of respondents (288 of 648, or 44.4%) reported practicing continuous no-till and half as many practiced reduced tillage, at 144, or 22.2% of the total. Rotational no-till accounted for 101 (15.6%) of the respondents.

Conventional tillage was the choice of 63 (9.7%)—split approximately evenly between commodity growers and horticulture crop producers, with some livestock producers as well—while 38 (5.9%), nearly all of whom were commodity crop producers, reported strip-tilling and 14 (2.2%) said they performed vertical tillage only. Strip tillage was similarly dominated by commodity growers.

MOST COMMON TILLAGE PRACTICE

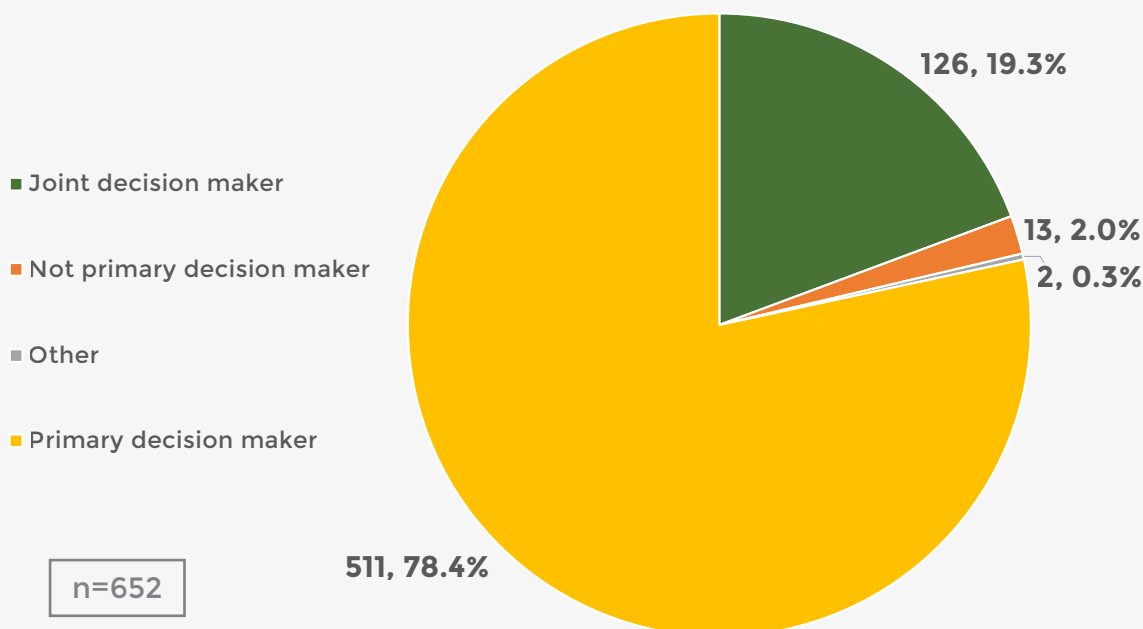


- OPERATIONAL CONTROL -

More than three in four (511, or 78.4%) of 652 respondents reported that they make most of the decisions about cover crops in their operation, while 126 (19.3%) made decisions jointly with others. Thirteen (2.0%) reported that someone else primarily made cover crop decisions, and two (0.3%) selected "Other situation."

- OPERATIONAL CONTROL - (CONTINUED)

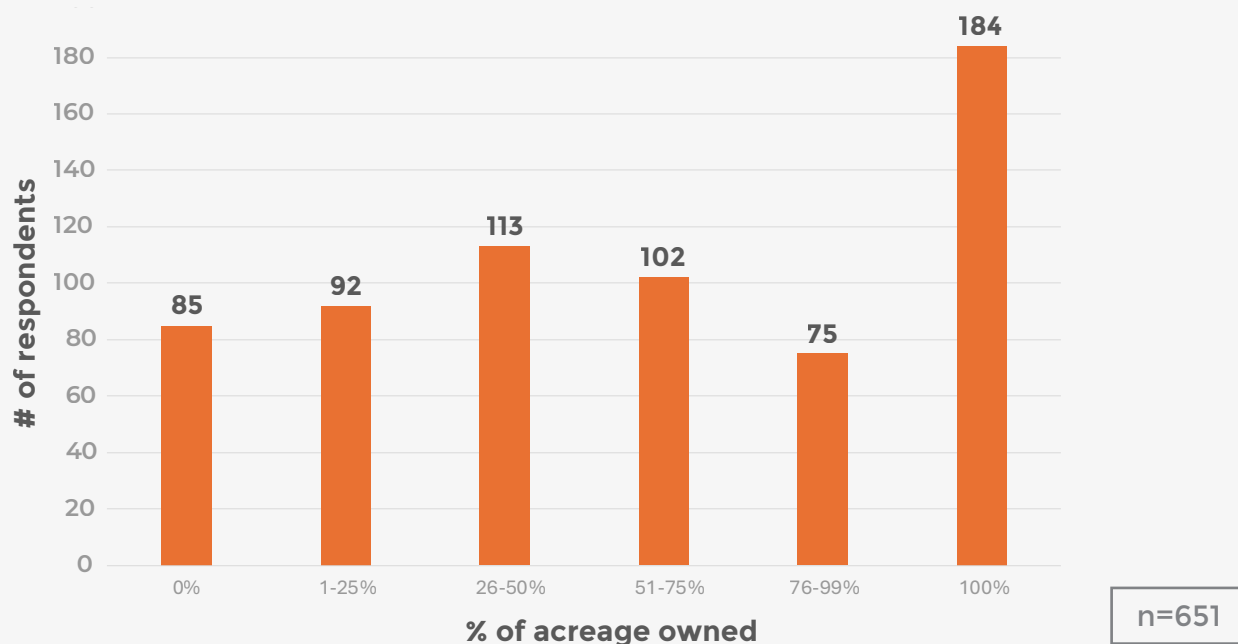
RESPONDENT ROLE IN COVER CROP DECISIONS



Land ownership is another factor in decision-making.

The largest group of respondents—184, or 28.3%, of 651 who answered the question—owned 100% of the land they farm; 102 (15.7%) owned 51 to 75%, and 75 farmers (11.5%) owned 76 to 99%. About 45% of respondents own less than half of the land they farm: 85 farmers (13.1%) owned none of the land they farm, 92 (14.1%) owned 1 to 25% of their farmland, and 113 (17.4%) owned 26 to 50% of the land they farm.

LAND OWNERSHIP



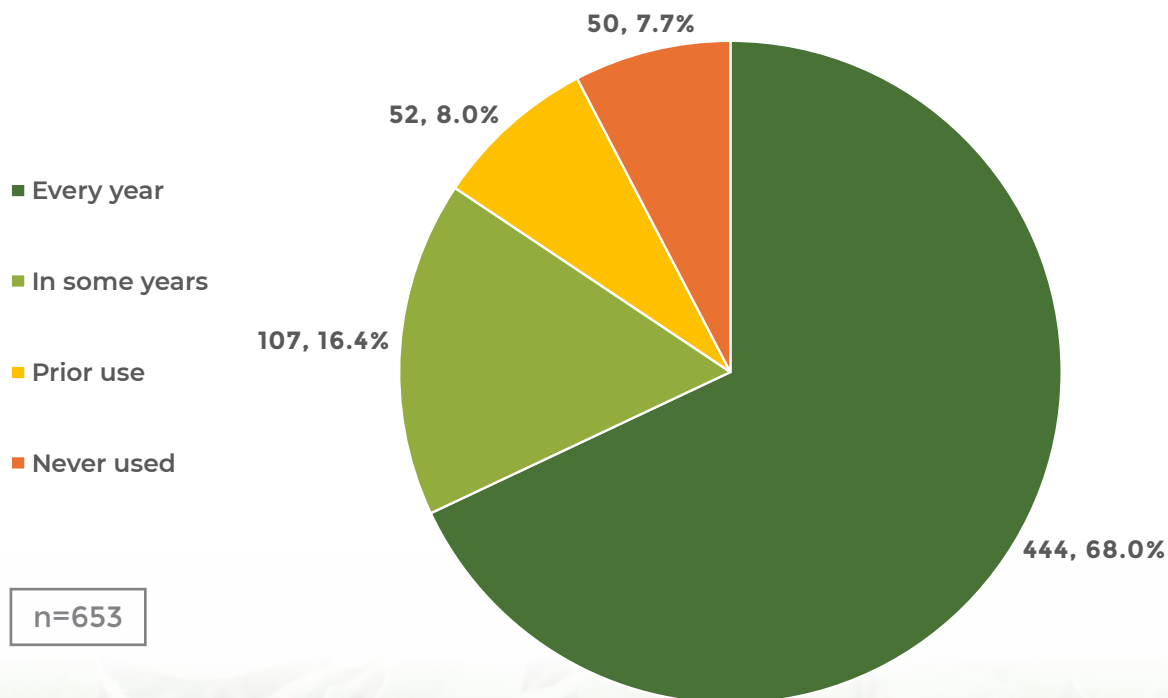
Later in the survey, cover crop users were asked if their landlords require cover crops. Of **332** respondents who answered, **298 (89.8%)** said “no.”

The most significant dividing line in SARE/CTIC/ASTA National Cover Crop Surveys has always been whether or not respondents used cover crops the year they filled out the questionnaire. This year, the question was a bit more nuanced: Non-users were further divided into groups that have never used cover crops, used them but did not use them in 2025-2026, or reported that they use them some years.

The more refined choices reflect a growing awareness that cover crop use is not a binary arrangement in which a producer simply does or does not use the practice as a matter of principle. Environmental factors such as weather that prevent timely cover crop planting, economic pressures including the cost of fuel or the value of cash crops, certain crop rotations, cover crop seed cost and availability, and social influences can impact cover crop use and can vary from season to season.

A significant majority of respondents to the 2026 survey reported using cover crops every year—444 of 653, or 68%. An additional 107 (16.4%) said they used cover crops some years. On the non-user side, 52 respondents (8.0%) formerly used cover crops but no longer do, and 50 (7.7%) never used cover crops.

COVER CROP USE

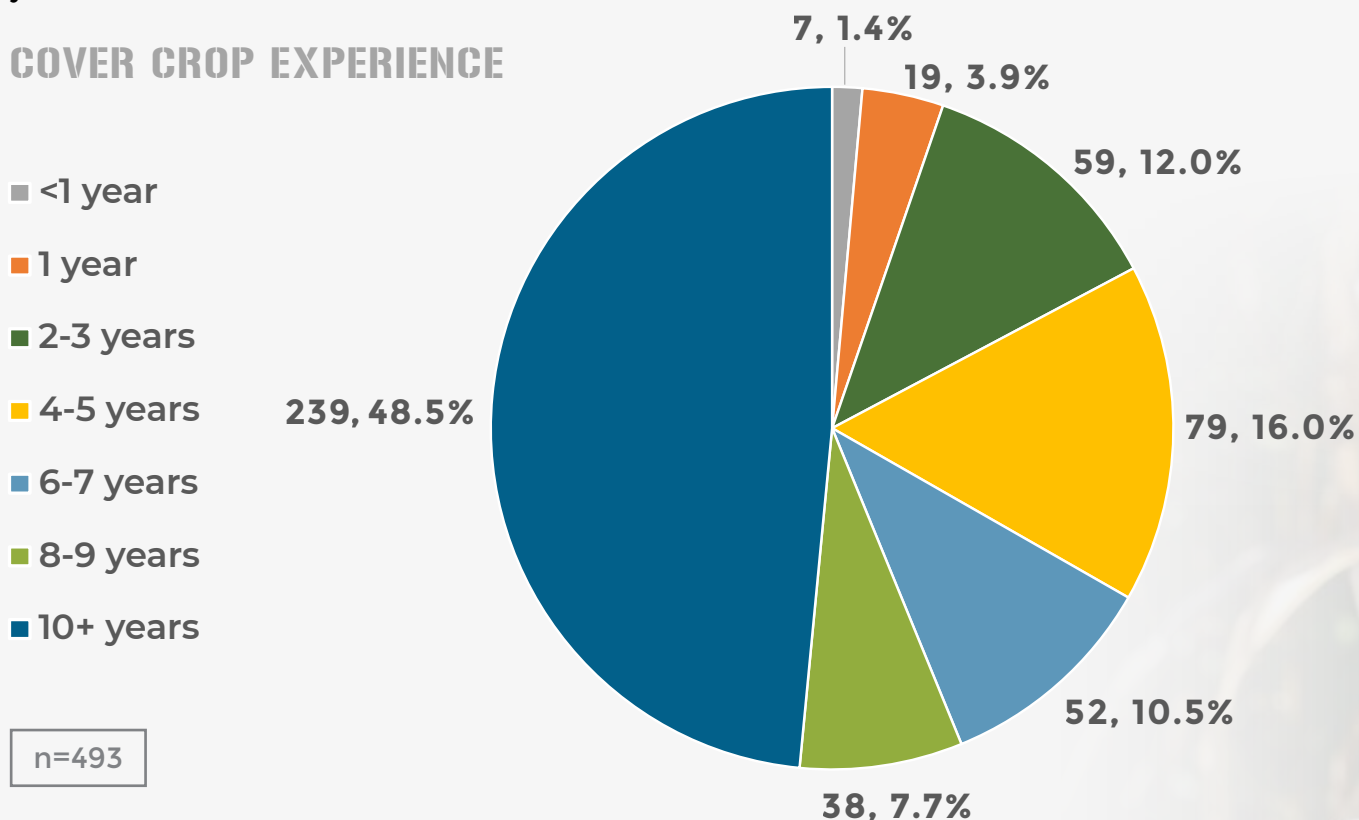


- EXPERIENCE DRIVES EXPANSION -

The largest group of respondents to the 2026 survey—493 growers, or 68% of the participants—were current cover crop users.

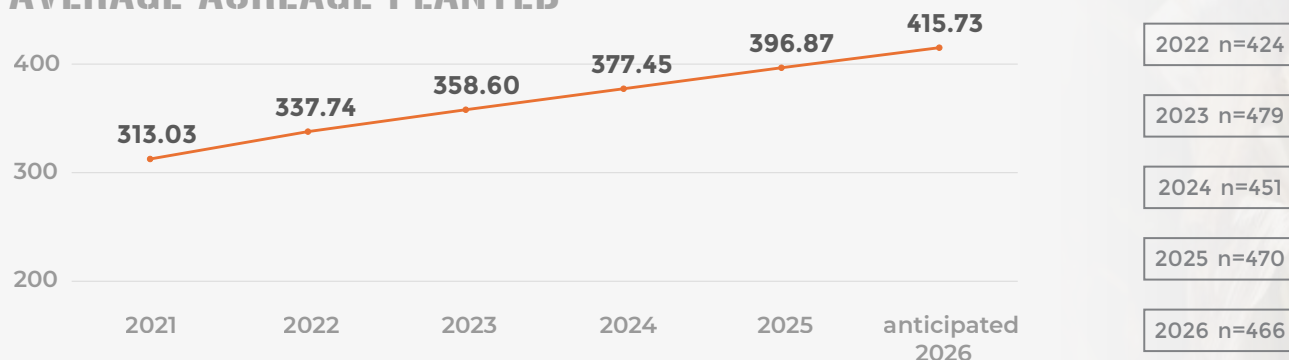
The group tended to be quite experienced cover crop users. Approximately half—239 of 493 who answered the question, or 48.5%—of the cover crop users had 10 years or more of experience with cover crops, 38 (7.7%) said they had used cover crops for 8 or 9 years, 52 (10.5%) had 6 to 7 years of cover cropping, and 79 (16%) reported 4 or 5 years with cover crops. Twelve percent, or 59 growers, had used cover crops for 2 to 3 years, and 26 (5.3%) for a year or less.

COVER CROP EXPERIENCE



The cover crop users, on an average acreage basis, reported a steady increase in cover crop planting—the average acres planted to cover crops grew by about 20 acres per year from 313 acres in 2021 to 397.9 acres in 2025, and respondents estimated that the trend would continue by estimating an average commitment of 415.7 acres of cover crops in the fall of 2026. It seems clear that experience with the practice inspires expansion among the survey's respondent pool.

AVERAGE ACREAGE PLANTED

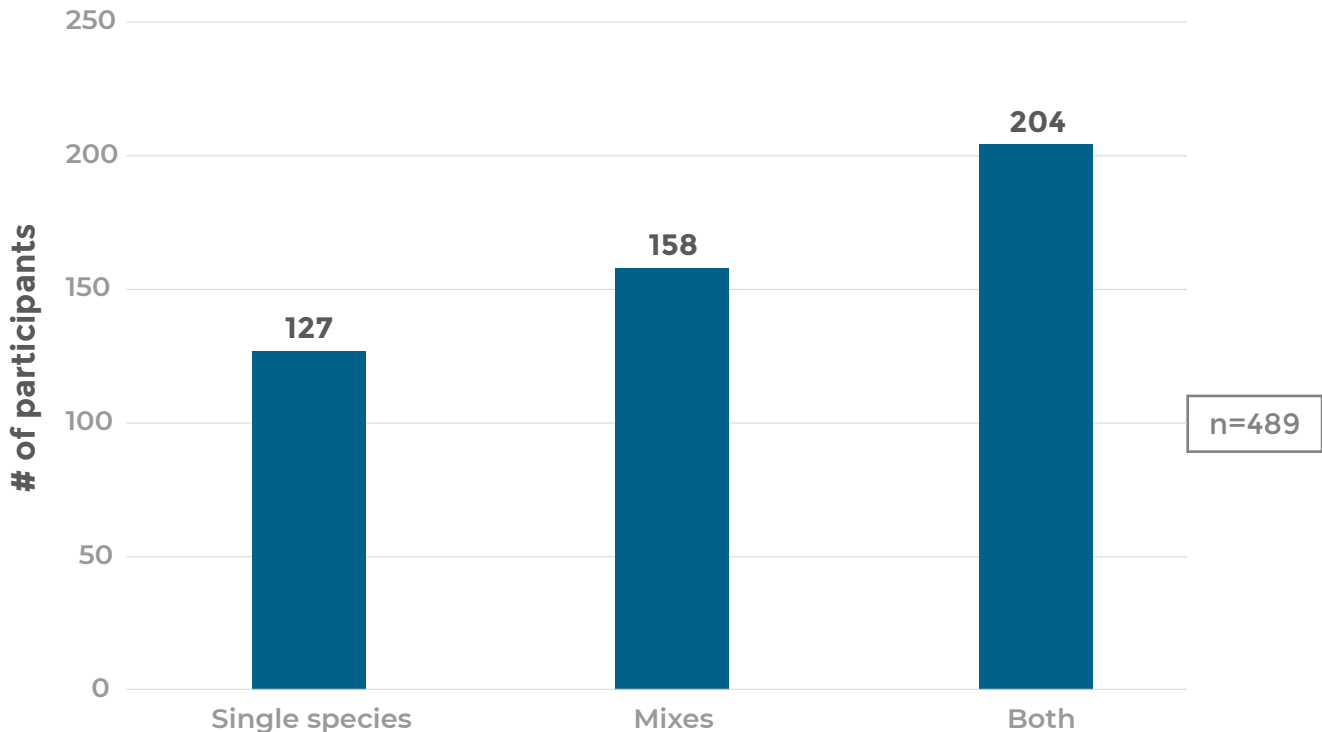


COVER CROP SEED

- NEARLY 75% USE MIXED SPECIES -

Cover crop users clearly see blends of cover crop species as a management tool. Of 489 users, 127 (25.9%) reported planting only single-species cover crops, while 158 (32.3%) said they plant cover crop mixes and 204 (41.7%) chose the “I plant both single-species and cover crop mixes, but in different scenarios.”

COVER CROP SPECIES PLANTED



This appears to be a steady pattern over the history to date of this survey series. In the 2013 and 2014 surveys, approximately 60% of the cover crop users reported planting species mixes. In those surveys, there was no option to identify a strategy of selecting single- or mixed-species cover crops based on conditions.

Cereal rye (*Secale cereale*) remains the clear favorite cover crop species and has dominated the survey series since the start. Seed is widely available, and cereal rye is prized for its abundant biomass, winter hardiness, weed-suppressing allelopathy, and robust root system that effectively scavenges nutrients in the soil. Among 439 cover crop users—whether they plant a single-species or mixes—cereal rye represented 110,778 acres planted in the fall of 2025, nearly three times as large an area as was planted to the second-place genus, radish (33,042 acres).

Oats (24,068 acres), rapeseed/canola (23,722), and turnips (22,699) were grouped closely at the next level, followed by winter wheat (21,730). The next group included crimson clover (17,361 acres), hairy vetch (15,508), triticale (12,594), winter barley (11,949), and annual ryegrass (11,187).

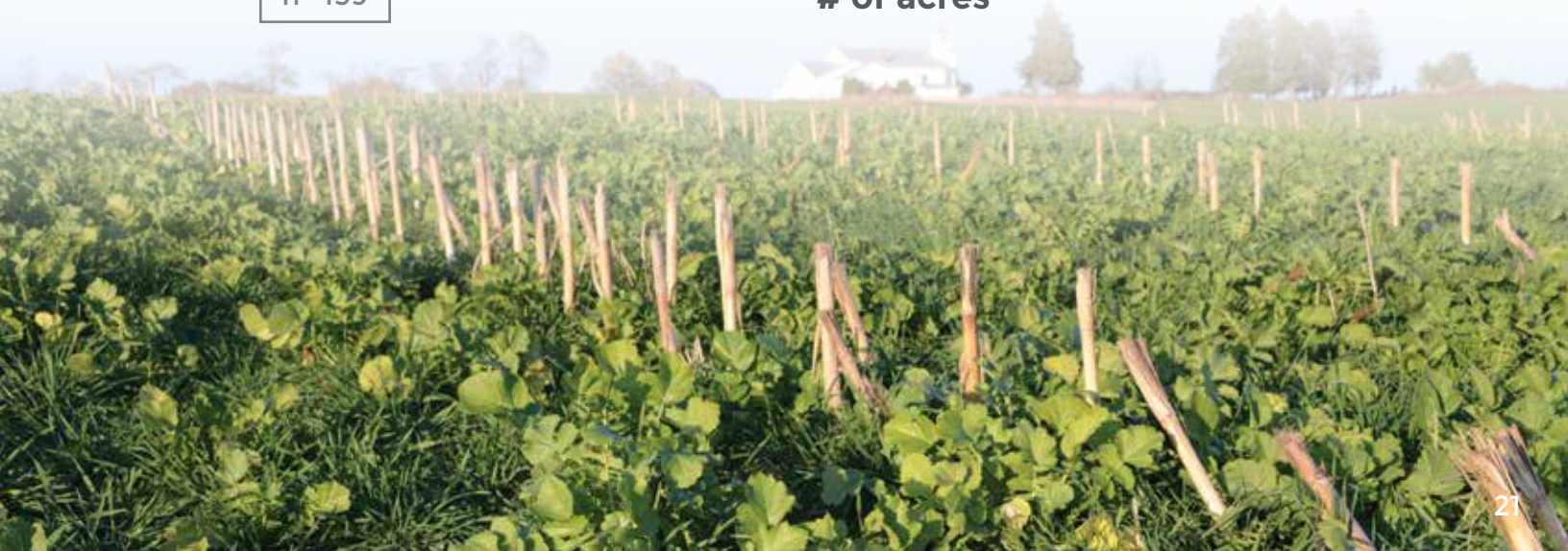
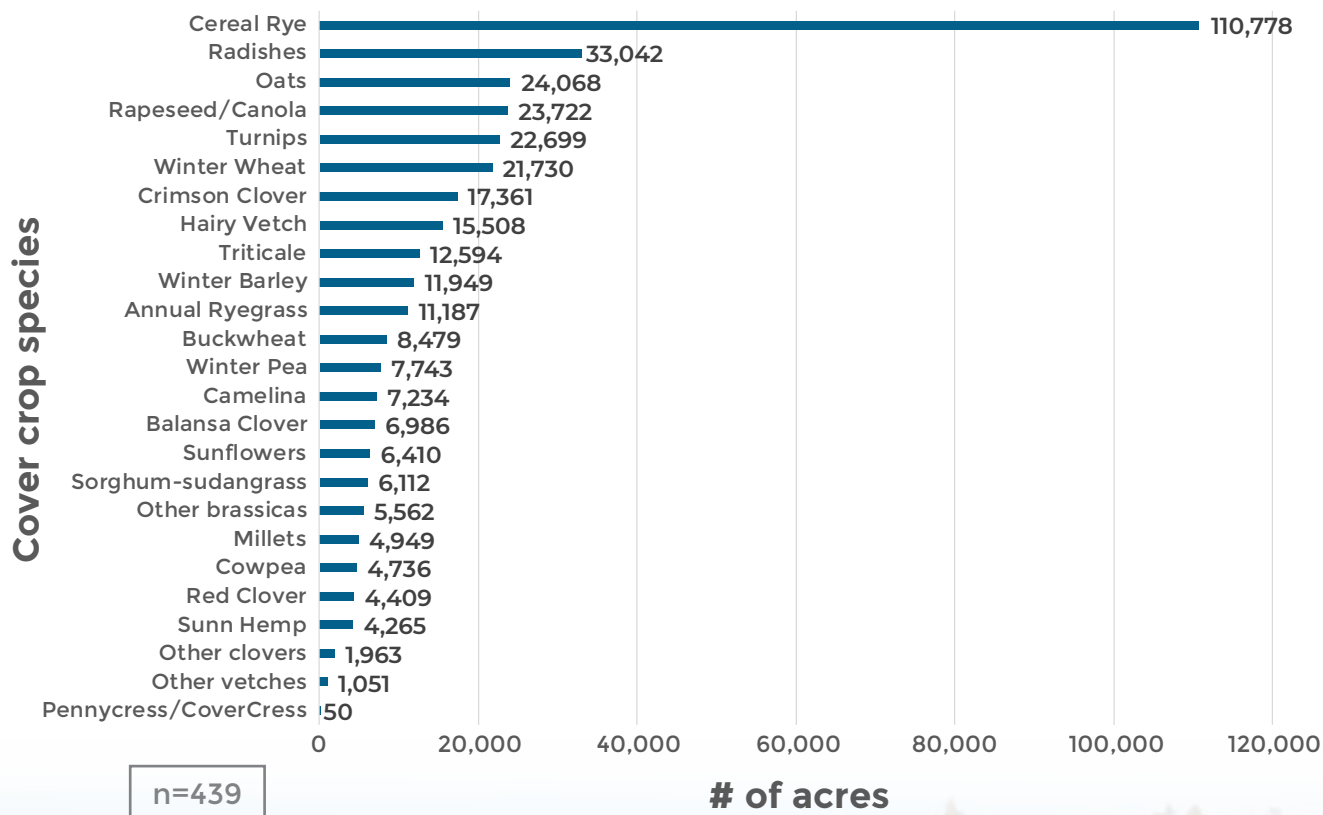


Photo: Edwin Remsburg & USDA-SARE

Buckwheat (8,479 acres), winter pea (7,743), camelina (7,234), balansa clover (6,986), and sunflowers (6,410) shifted the focus to a suite of broadleaf options, followed by sorghum-sudangrass at 6,112 acres and “Other brassicas” with 5,562.

Below the 5,000-acre mark, millets (4,949), cowpea (4,736), red clover (4,409), sunn hemp (4,265), other clovers (1,963), and other vetches (1,051) were followed at the end of the list by pennycress/CoverCress, which respondents planted on a total of 50 acres.

SPECIES PLANTED IN 2025

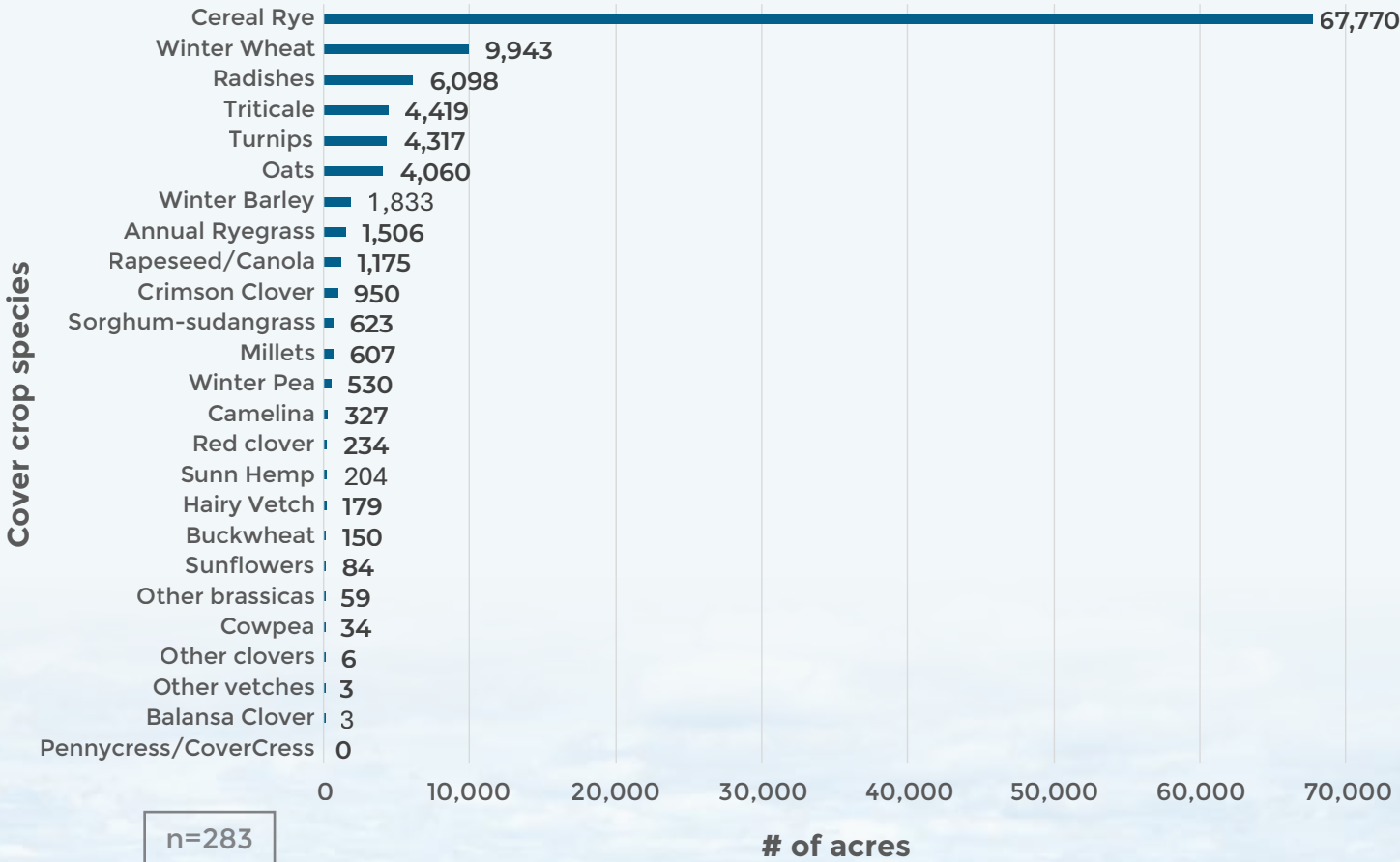


- CEREAL RYE TOPS
THE LIST -

Among cover crop users who plant a single species, cereal rye was by far the go-to option, with 67,770 acres planted among 196 respondents. Winter wheat, the second most popular choice, represented a small fraction of that space with 9,943 acres. Radishes (6,098), triticale (4,419), turnips (4,317), and oats had strong fan bases. Annual ryegrass at 1,506 acres and rapeseed/canola (1,175) saw some use as solo cover crops. Below 1,000 acres, selections for single-species planting included the gamut of grasses, legumes, and brassicas, with crimson clover (950 acres), sorghum-sudangrass (623), millets (607), winter pea (530), camelina (327), red clover (234), sunn hemp (204), hairy vetch (179), and buckwheat (150).

Creativity continued, with sub-100-acre commitments to sunflowers (84 acres), “Other brassicas” (59), cowpea (34), “Other clovers” (6), and “Other vetches” and balansa clover at three acres apiece.

SINGLE-SPECIES COVER CROPS PLANTED IN 2025



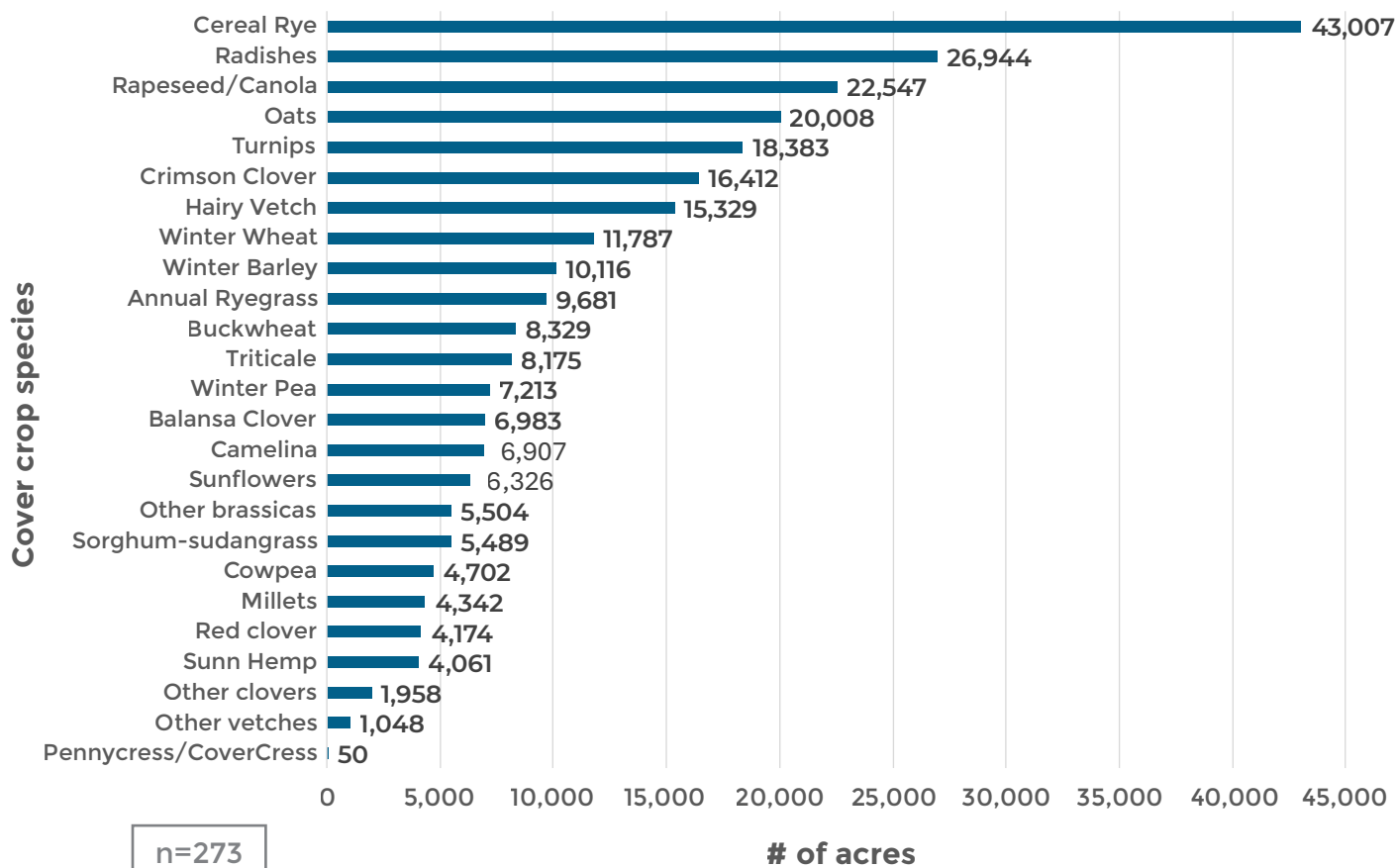
While cool-season cover crop mixes tended to include two to three species, warm-season mixes typically included four or more species.

Cereal rye maintains its dominance among species in cover crop mixes, with 43,007 acres planted to the popular grass by cover crop users who report planting mixes. Radishes are another key component of many blends, with 26,944 mixed acres, and rapeseed/canola comes in third with 22,547 acres, followed by oats in 20,008 acres of mixes.

Between 10,000 and 20,000 acres of blended cover crops, turnips top the group with 18,383 acres, followed by crimson clover (16,412), hairy vetch (15,329), winter wheat (11,787), and winter barley (10,116).

Annual ryegrass led the next echelon of mix options with 9,681 acres, followed by buckwheat (8,329), triticale (8,175), winter pea (7,213), balansa clover (6,983), camelina (6,907), and sunflowers (6,326), followed by the closely matched “Other brassicas” (5,504) and sorghum-sudangrass (5,489). As with single-species plantings, cowpea (4,702), millets (4,342), red clover (4,174), and sunn hemp (4,061) are closely grouped toward the bottom of the list. “Other clovers” (1,958), “Other vetches” (1,048), and pennycress/CoverCress (50) pick up the end.

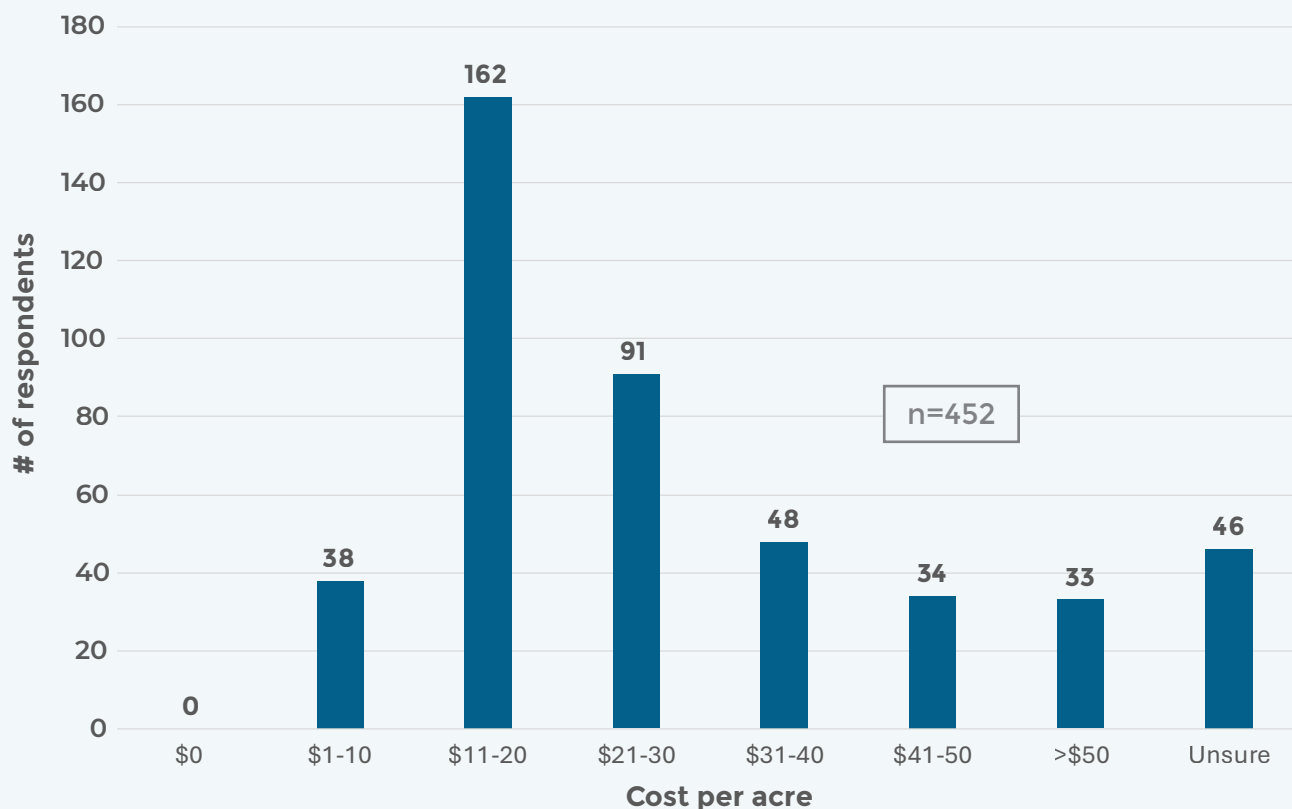
COVER CROP SPECIES PLANTED IN MIXES IN 2025



The ability—and will—to plant cover crops starts with the cost and availability of seed. In the 2026 survey, the largest number of cover crop users, 162 of 452 respondents or 35.8%, reported paying \$11 to \$20 per acre for cover crop seed. (Land preparation and planting costs were excluded from these figures.)

The next-largest group, 91 growers (20.1%) paid \$21 to \$30 per acre for cover crop seed, while 48 (10.6%) estimated their seed cost at \$31 to \$40, and 34 (7.5%) paid \$41 to \$50. Thirty-eight (8.4%) reported paying \$1 to \$10 per acre for cover crop seed, while 33 (7.3%) were at the other end of the chart with cover crop seed costs above \$50 per acre. None reported paying no money for seed, and 46 (10.2%) were not sure or could not quantify how much their seed cost.

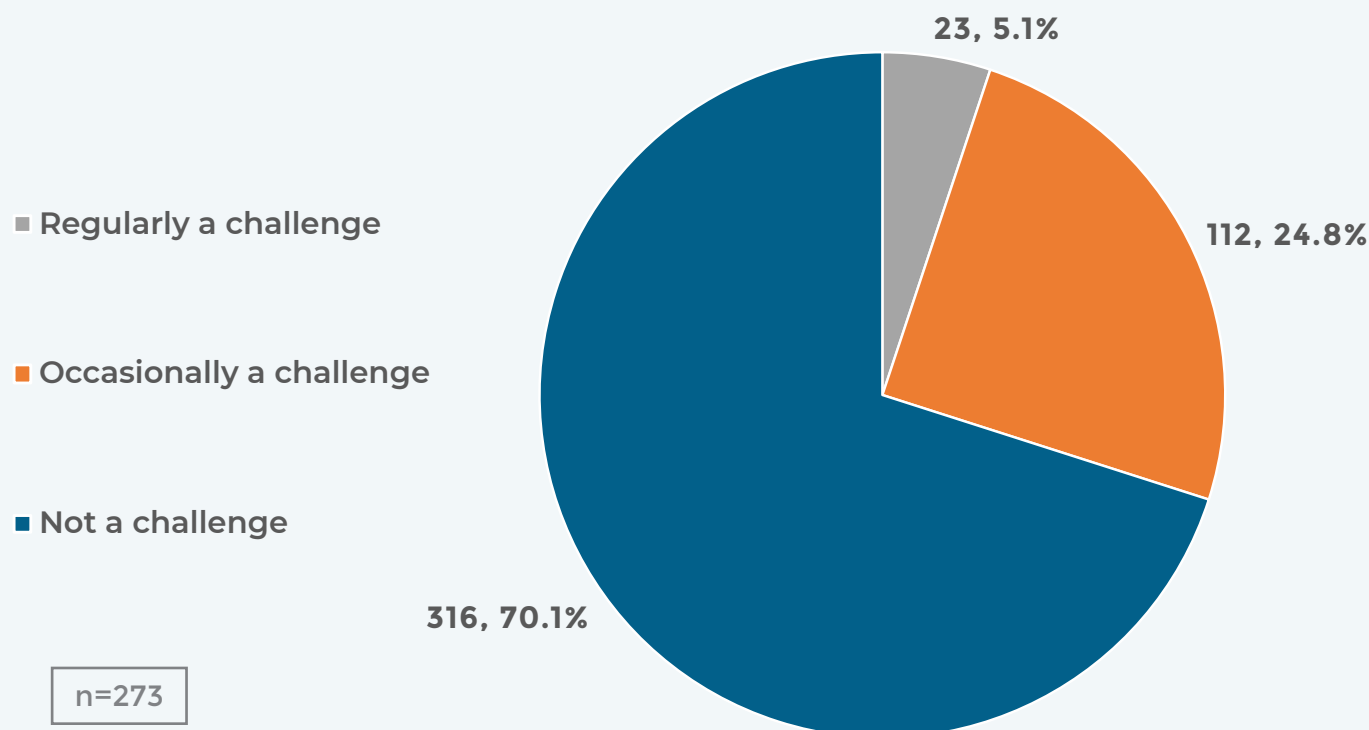
AVERAGE COVER CROP SEED COST



In general terms—noting that changes in respondent pools and question phrasing from survey to survey make it difficult to infer statistical trends among years in this survey series—cover crop seed cost is somewhat lower on average since the National Cover Crop Survey team began gathering data in 2012 and roughly leveled off since 2016-2017. The first year of the project, growers said they were willing to pay a mean of \$25 per acre for cover crop seed. The following year, Midwestern growers reported paying a median of \$25 per acre for cover crop seed, while their peers in the West paid a median of \$40 per acre. The 2016 national median was \$22 per acre, and in 2017 and 2019-2020, half the respondents paid \$11 to \$20 per acre. In 2022-2023, the median cover crop seed cost was reported to be \$21 per acre. The lower cost of seed reported in this survey likely represents the fact many farmers are using a lower rate of seeding than in the past, while some farmers are growing their own cover crop seed, saving on seed cost in that fashion.

The majority of surveyed farmers had adequate access to cover crop seed, with some room for improvement. Asked if they faced any challenges obtaining their preferred species of cover crop seed, 316 of 451 respondents (70.1%) said no, while just 23 (5.1%) said yes and 112 (24.8%) said it was occasionally a challenge.

FREQUENCY OF DIFFICULTY OBTAINING PREFERRED COVER CROP SEED

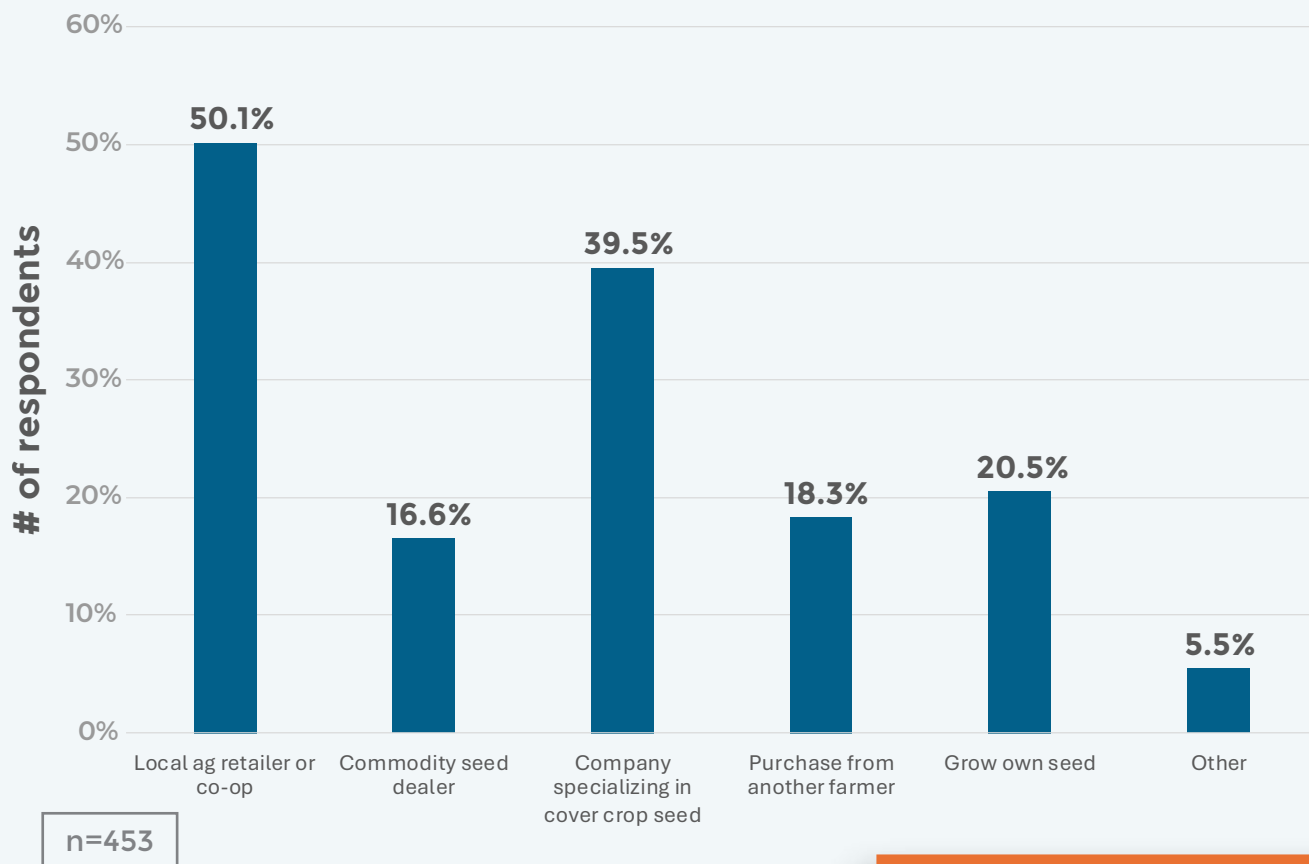


Half of the cover crop users (50.1%, or 227 of 453 growers) reported purchasing their cover crop seed through a local ag retailer or co-op, while 39.5% (179) purchased from a company specializing in cover crop seed. One in 5 (20.5%, or 93 cover crop users) grew their own cover crop seed, 18.3% (83) purchased seed from another farmer, and 16.6% (75) purchased their cover crop seed from a commodity seed dealer that also sold corn, soybean, wheat, and/or other cash crop seed.

Write-in answers from 5.5% (25 growers) included five mentions of online cover crop seed purchases (including two that specified Amazon) and six indicated that they purchase organic cover crop seed. Two mentioned purchasing bulk seed at a grocery store, and several were growers or seed salespeople.



COVER CROP SEED SOURCES



Local ag retailers and co-ops are likely to maintain their current customer base for cover crop seed, while companies specializing in cover crop seed appear poised for growth. When asked where they would prefer to purchase their cover crop seed in the future and select all the options that applied to their operations, 48.8% (220 growers) identified their local ag retailer or co-op, and 41.9% (189) set their sights on purchasing from a company specializing in cover crop seeds.

About one-third of the respondents (32.8%, or 148 growers) would like to grow their own cover crop seed, while 24.2% (96) plan to purchase seed from another farmer. Commodity seed dealers appear to be holding steady with a slight dip, with 15.3% (69 growers) citing them as a future preferred source.

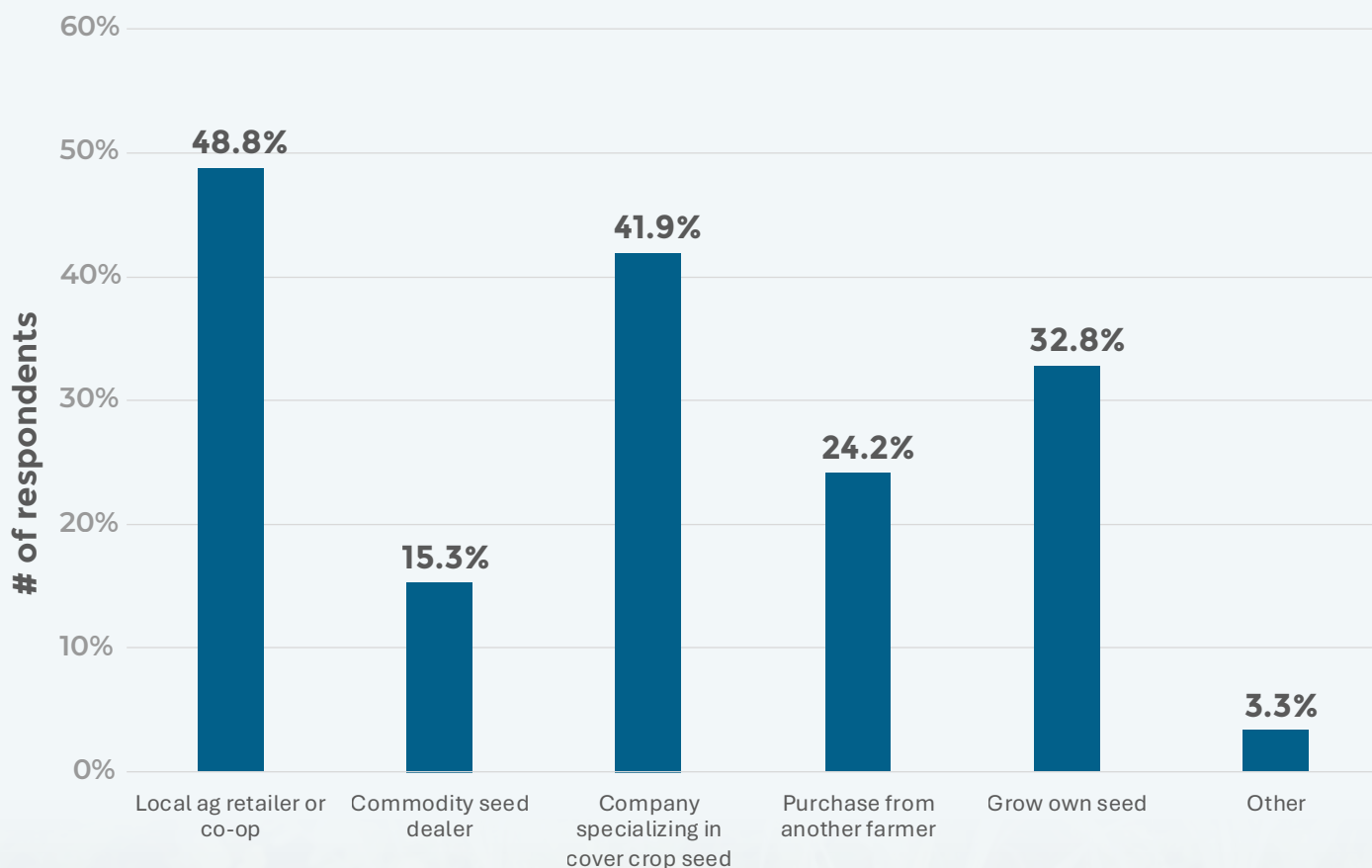


- CO-OPS & COVER CROP SEED COMPANIES DOMINATE SOURCING - (CONTINUED)

Fifteen cover crop users wrote in answers under “Other,” and the largest category of open answers—specified by four of the respondents—revolved around finding the lowest-cost source of seed and one noted a preference for a permanent subsidy of seed cost by Soil and Water Conservation Districts or the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. One specified sourcing organic cover crop seed, one expressed an interest in buying seed through a peer group. Two said they would buy from the company they own or work for, and one name-dropped a specific seed company.

Wrote one respondent, “My preference would be to develop local seed exchange networks and to encourage people to save and trade seeds.” It should be noted that ASTA maintains saving seed should be restricted to non-commercial activities, where all other regulations and obligations associated with seed use are respected.

PREFERRED COVER CROP SEED SOURCES

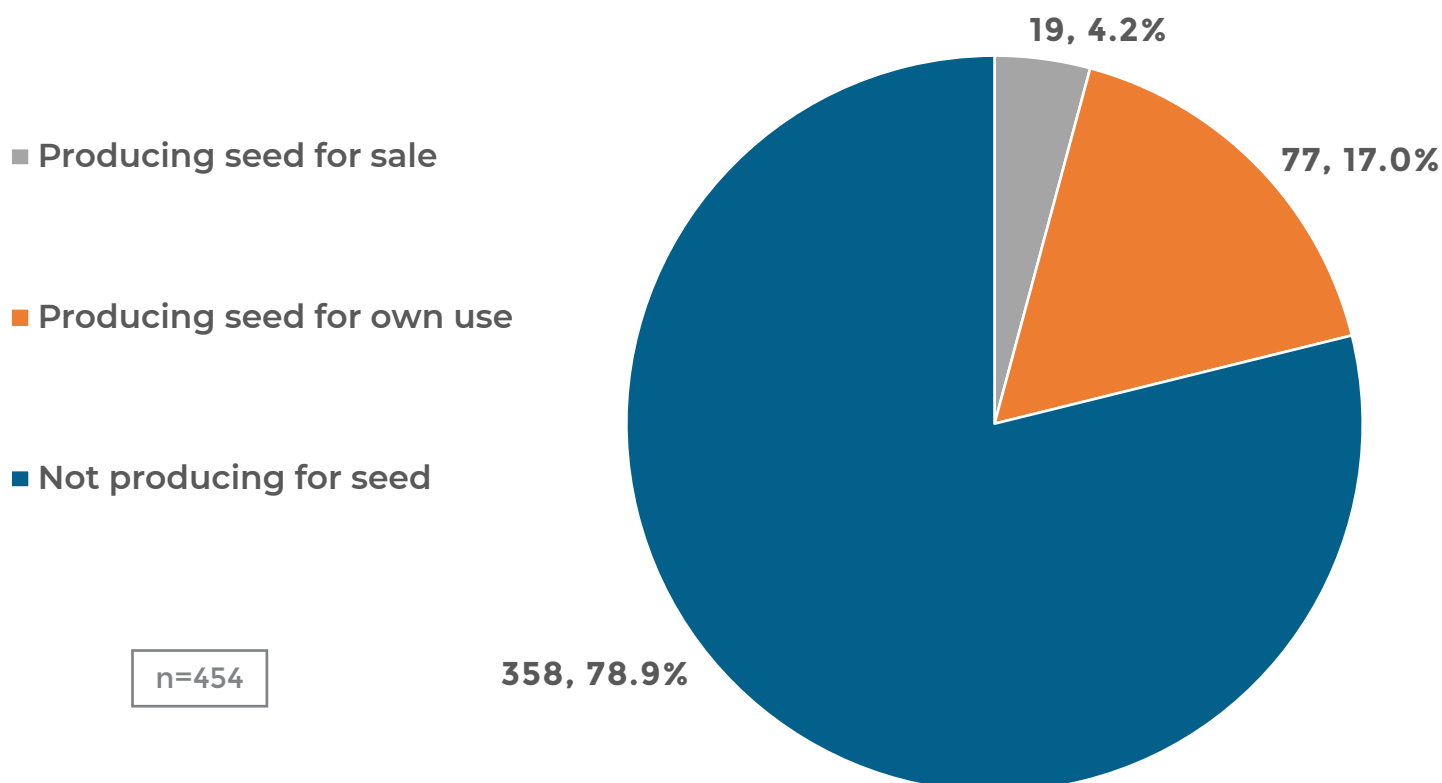


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- COVER CROP SEED GROWERS REPORT ADDITIONAL PROFITABILITY -

For some cover crop users, cover crop seed represents a business opportunity or a chance to save money. Nineteen of 454 cover crop users (4.2%) said they grew cover crop seed for sale, and 77 (17%) reported growing cover crop seed for their own use.

RESPONDENTS PRODUCING COVER CROPS FOR SEED

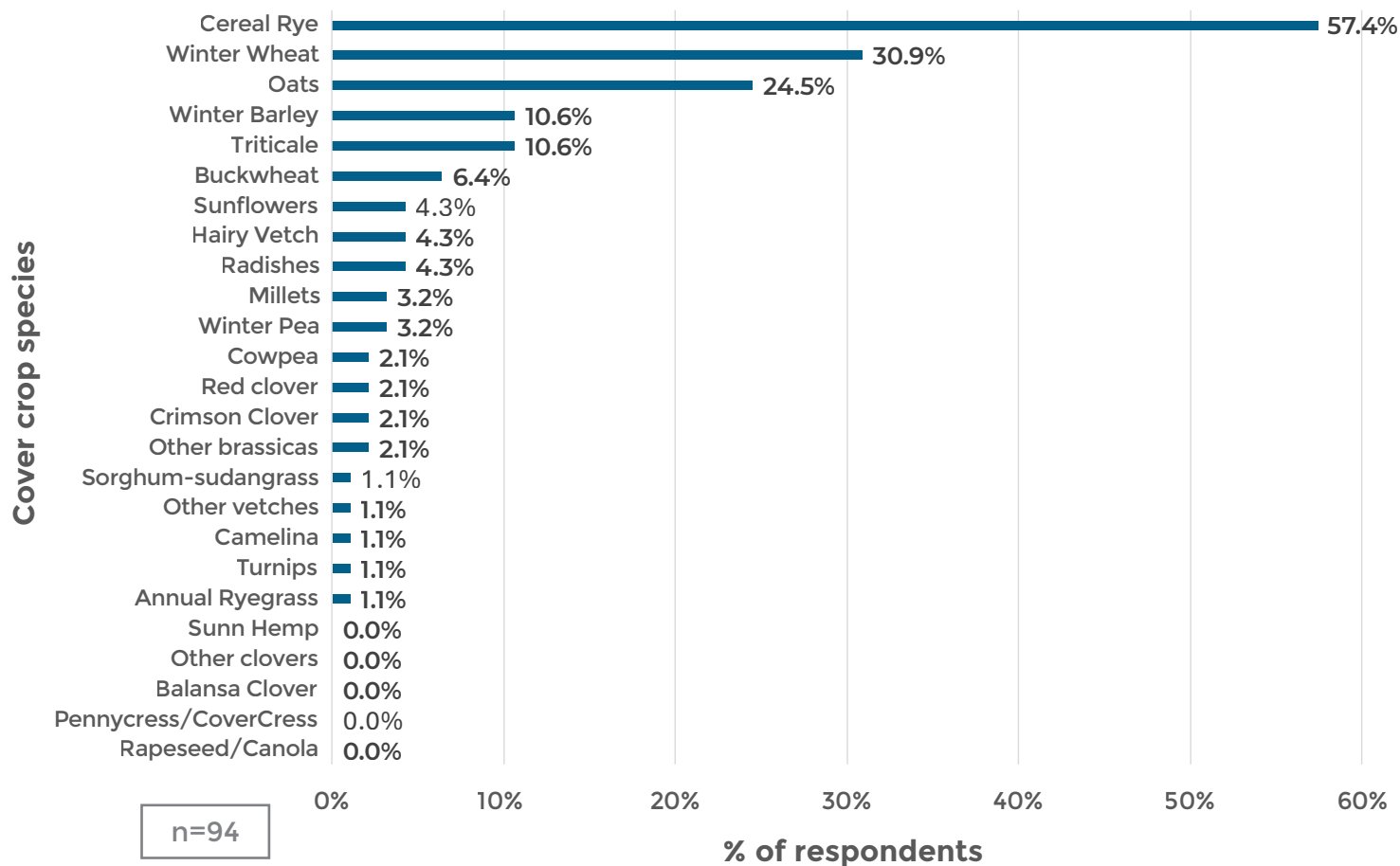


Among the cover crop seed growers, cereal rye dominated, with 57.5% of 94 growers (54) identifying it as a species they produced for seed. Brown-bagged winter wheat seed was the choice of 30.9% (29) and oats were grown by 24.5% (23). An equal number—10.6%, or 10 respondents—grew winter barley or triticale for seed, while 4.3% (4) apiece grew sunflowers, radishes, or hairy vetch. Buckwheat was produced by 6.4%, or six growers, while 3.2% (3) grew millets or winter pea.

Two growers apiece (2.1%) listed cowpea, red clover, crimson clover, and “Other brassicas,” while 1 grower (1.1%) each identified sorghum-sudangrass, annual ryegrass, turnips, camelina, or “Other vetches” as seed crops. None selected sunn hemp, “Other clovers,” balansa clover, pennycress, or rapeseed/canola.

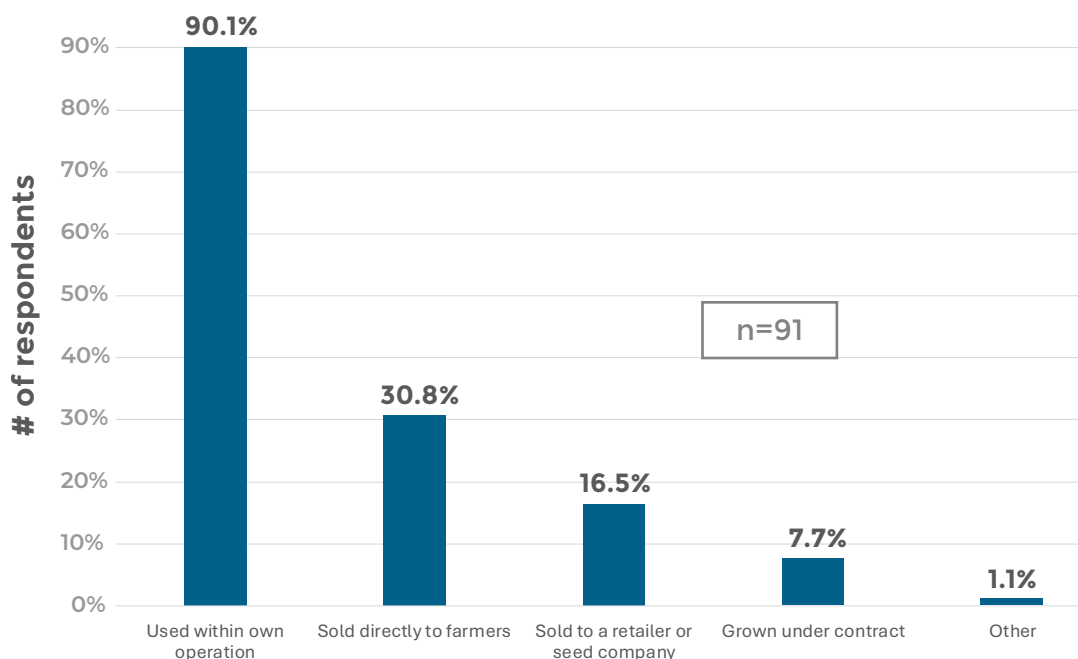
- COVER CROP SEED GROWERS REPORT ADDITIONAL PROFITABILITY - (CONTINUED)

SPECIES PRODUCED FOR SEED



COVER CROP SEED MARKETING CHANNELS

Among 91 growers of cover crop seed, 90.1% (82) reported using their seed on their own operations, 30.8% (28) sold directly to farmers, 16.5% (15) sold to a retailer or seed company, and 7.7% (7) grew seed under contract. One respondent chose "Other" and specified selling to a custom applicator.

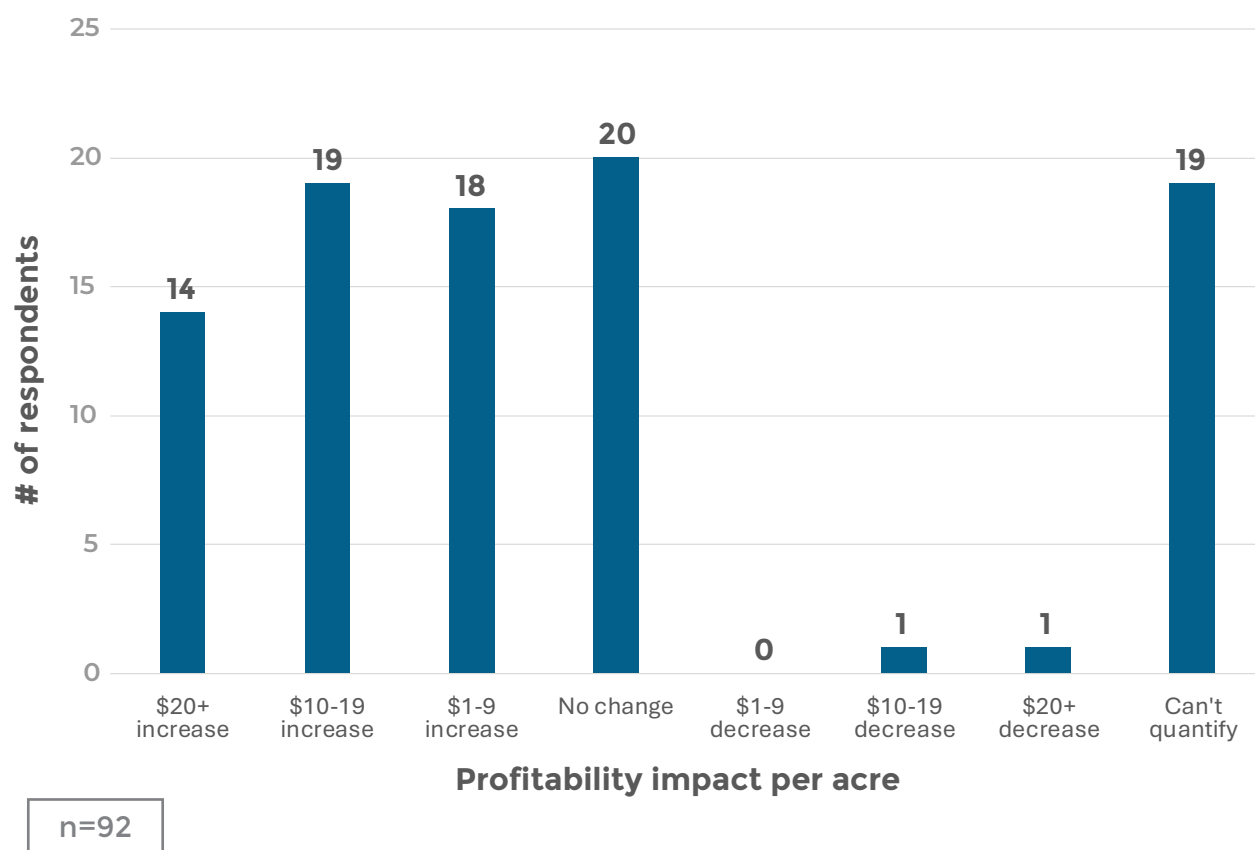


- COVER CROP SEED GROWERS REPORT ADDITIONAL PROFITABILITY - (CONTINUED)

Overall, half of the users who grew their own seed saw economic upsides to the practice—18 of 92 respondents (19.6%) reported a net profit increase of \$1 to \$9 per acre from growing their own cover crop seed, 19 (20.6%) saw a net profit boost of \$10 to \$19 per acre, and 14 (15.2%) tallied an increase in net profit of more than \$20 per acre. Just one grower reported a decrease in net profit of \$10 to \$19 per acre, and another said they saw a decrease in profit of more than \$20 an acre.

Twenty (21.3%) said they saw no significant change in net profit from growing their own cover crop seed, and 19 (20.6%) said they didn't know or could not quantify the profit impact.

IMPACT OF SEED PRODUCTION ON PROFITABILITY



This year, the survey dove deeper than usual into cover crop users' motivation to start—and to continue—growing their own cover crop seed.

By far, the largest number—45 growers of 80, or 56.2%—said they started growing cover crops to save money, while the next-highest motivation, cited by 15 growers (18.8%), was to ensure availability or dependability of seed supply. Ten (12.5%) provided some variation on, “I was growing the crop anyway, so it made sense to harvest seed,” while six (7.5%) are using land unsuitable for row crops to produce cover crop seed.

- COVER CROP SEED GROWERS REPORT ADDITIONAL PROFITABILITY - (CONTINUED)

Five growers (6.3%) mentioned a desire for a specific variety or regionally adapted seed, while the same number mentioned diversifying their own crop rotation and another five said they wanted to experiment or help others. Three growers (3.8%) started growing their own seed because they wanted organic cover crops, and another three said growing cover crop seed improved their soil health. Two growers (2.5%) expressed concerns about weed contamination—presumably in their cover crop seed.

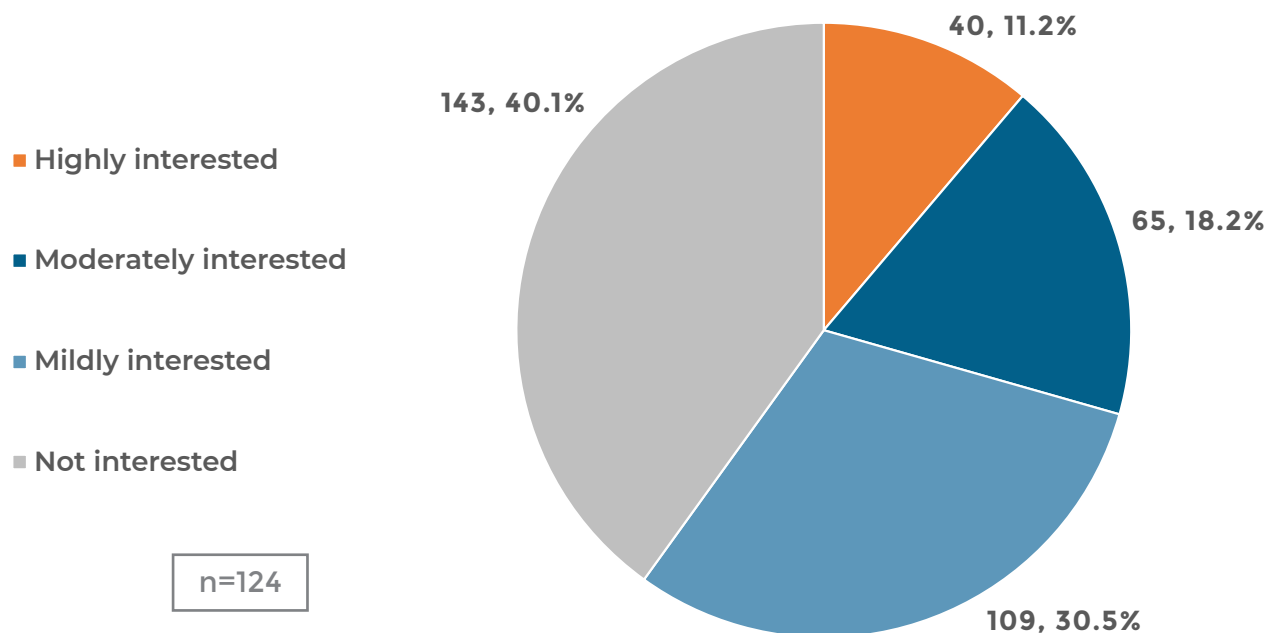
Asked why they continue growing their own cover crop seed, the top two answers are consistent with the motivation that got growers to start the practice—41 of 81 (50.6%) said cost or economics was the driver, and 15 (18.5%) were motivated by availability or dependability.

Diversification and soil health motivated 12 (14.8%) to keep growing their own seed, marking an increase over the 10.1% that those two motivations represented as impetus to start growing cover crop seed. Eight (9.9%) said growing cover crop seed fit their operation, while seven (8.6%) wanted organic or regionally adapted seed and another seven said they were meeting demand from others.

Three users (3.7%) said the practicality of harvesting seed from covers they were growing anyway was their motivation to keep growing cover crop seed, and concerns about weed contamination, having a use for the straw, and enjoyment or helping others garnered two growers (2.5%) apiece. One grower (1.2%) was only one year into the practice so far, and another reported that they would not continue growing seed.

Growing cover crop seed was highly interesting to 40 of 357 cover crop users (11.2%) who were not currently growing seed, moderately interesting to 65 (18.2%) and mildly interesting to 109 (30.5%). Four in 10–143, or 40.1%—said they were not interested in adopting the practice.

INTEREST IN PRODUCING COVER CROPS FOR SEED



- COVER CROP SEED GROWERS REPORT ADDITIONAL PROFITABILITY - (CONTINUED)

Asked what training or information they would need in order to produce cover crops for seed, 79 respondents led with general training and information on equipment needs. Other subjects to learn included marketing cover crop seed, harvest, cleaning, storage, variety selection, agronomics, and regional specifics that would aid in production.

Clearly, interest in growing cover crop seed is strong. It is worth noting, however, that in the 2016 National Cover Crop Survey, three out of four cover crop users agreed with statements that information on seed purity, germination, and noxious weed content was important to them, and in 2017, the same proportion said they always or sometimes looked for a seed tag on their cover crop seed so they could verify its quality. That indicates a strong reliance on professionally grown, harvested, and processed cover crop seed.



- CONDITIONS, ROTATIONS, HARVESTS, EQUIPMENT, AND TIME CONTRIBUTE TO INTERMITTENT USE -

Just as important as understanding how cover crop users employ their cover crops is understanding where or when they choose not to use them. Six in 10 (60.8%, or 284 of 467 cover crop users) said “yes” to the statement, “Are there years where you do not use cover crops on some fields?” and 39.2% (183) said “no.”

Users’ reasons for not using cover crops in those years were led by “Cash crop harvested too late to plant covers, which was chosen by 43.9% of the 280 respondents to the question, who were allowed to select multiple answers.

“I do not cover crop 100% of my acreage” was the choice of 41.8%, followed by “Conditions too dry or wet to plant covers” (38.6%) and “Not enough time or labor to plant covers (37.9%).

The next two reasons for not planting cover crops related to crop rotation and were closely grouped: “Cover crops are not used ahead of certain crops” (30%) and “Rotation includes a crop that limits cover crop use (such as wheat)” (27.5%). The final reason was the cost of cover crop seed (25.4%).

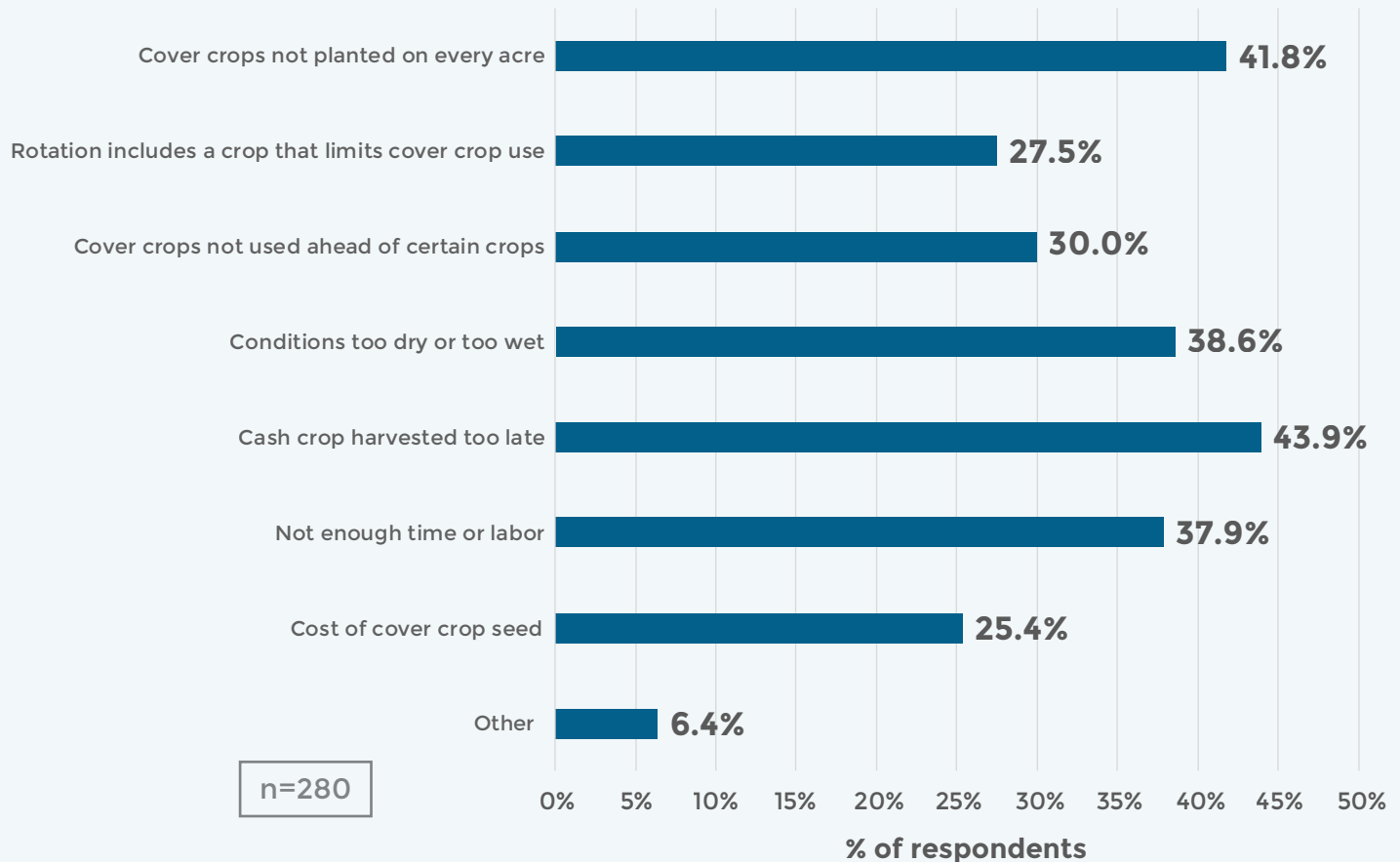
Respondents could also type in specifics by selecting “Other,” which 6.4% chose. The most common of the write-in answers related to cost or economics, which accounted for four of the 17 write-ins, and water, which involved three.

A few noted that cover crops don’t necessarily fit parts of the operation. For instance, one wrote, “We don’t often plant within the most mature parts of our orchards, except after a heavy pruning, since there isn’t sufficient sunlight to the orchard floor” or “I only cover crop after disturbance” and another noted, “Livestock currently pastured and unable to separate out for cover cropping.”

One grower cited a lack of access to cover crop seed; another mentioned not having a drill to utilize for seeding.

- CONDITIONS, ROTATIONS,
HARVESTS, EQUIPMENT, AND TIME
CONTRIBUTE TO INTERMITTENT USE -
(CONTINUED)

REASONS FOR YEARS WITHOUT COVER CROP USE

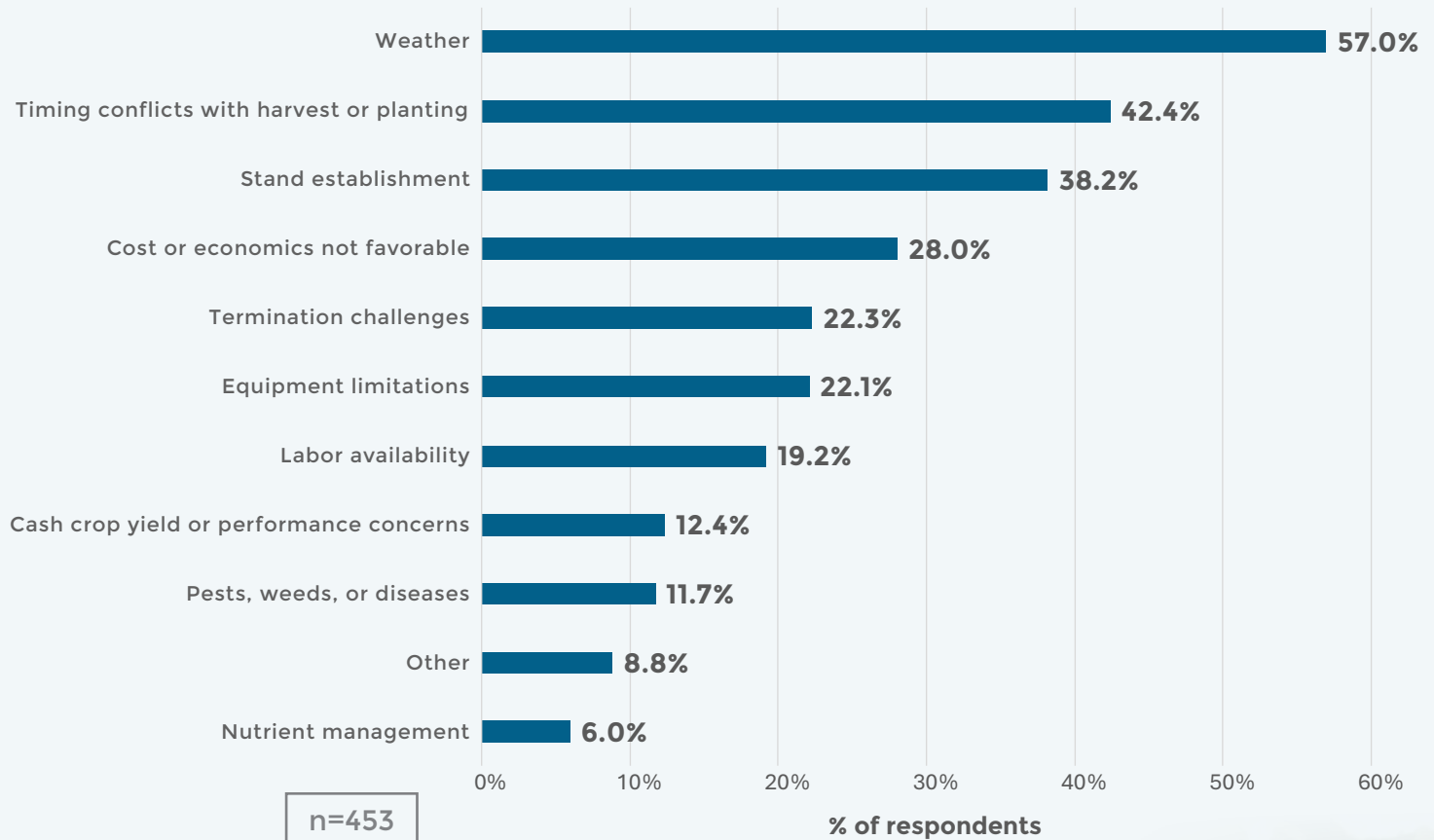


The survey allowed cover crop users to select multiple answers to describe the challenges they face with cover crop use. The top option, weather challenges, was selected by 56.9% of the 453 respondents. The next most commonly selected challenges were timing conflicts with cash crop harvest or planting, selected by 42.4% and difficulty establishing a cover crop stand, selected by 38.2%.

Unfavorable cost or economics came in fourth on the list with 28%, while termination challenges and equipment limitations were reported by 22.3% and 22.1%, respectively. Labor availability was noted by 19.2%.

Yield or performance concerns in the cash crop challenged 12.4%, while pest, weed, or disease issues were an issue for 11.7%. Nutrient management challenges ended the list with 5.9%.

COVER CROP CHALLENGES



“Other” challenges were identified by 8.8% of the respondents. Four indicated that they experienced few or no challenges. Several wrote in answers that were aligned with multiple choice options such as the four who identified “cost” (also described by one as “poverty”) or “Timing in a market garden between cash crop and cover crop for maximum benefit,” or “Small planting window.” In a similar vein, timing and logistics challenged one respondent who stated, “We spread all of ours with a fertilizer cart after corn harvest. This sometimes results in germination issues versus drilling, but we don’t have time to drill everything during harvest time.”

Several of the write-in comments shed light on other concerns not included in the multiple-choice options. The most often-cited challenge in the “Other” category was moisture, written in by seven respondents. Concerns about specific pests included slugs, moss, geese, weeds such as wild turnips and mustard, and two who mentioned deer.

Access to cover crop seeds was mentioned twice, as was difficulty finding certified organic options for cover crops.

It was sobering to read, “Landlord hates cover crops,” but delightful to find, “Whatever happens happens as long as sheep eat it, it’s a bonus for more days off grazing.”

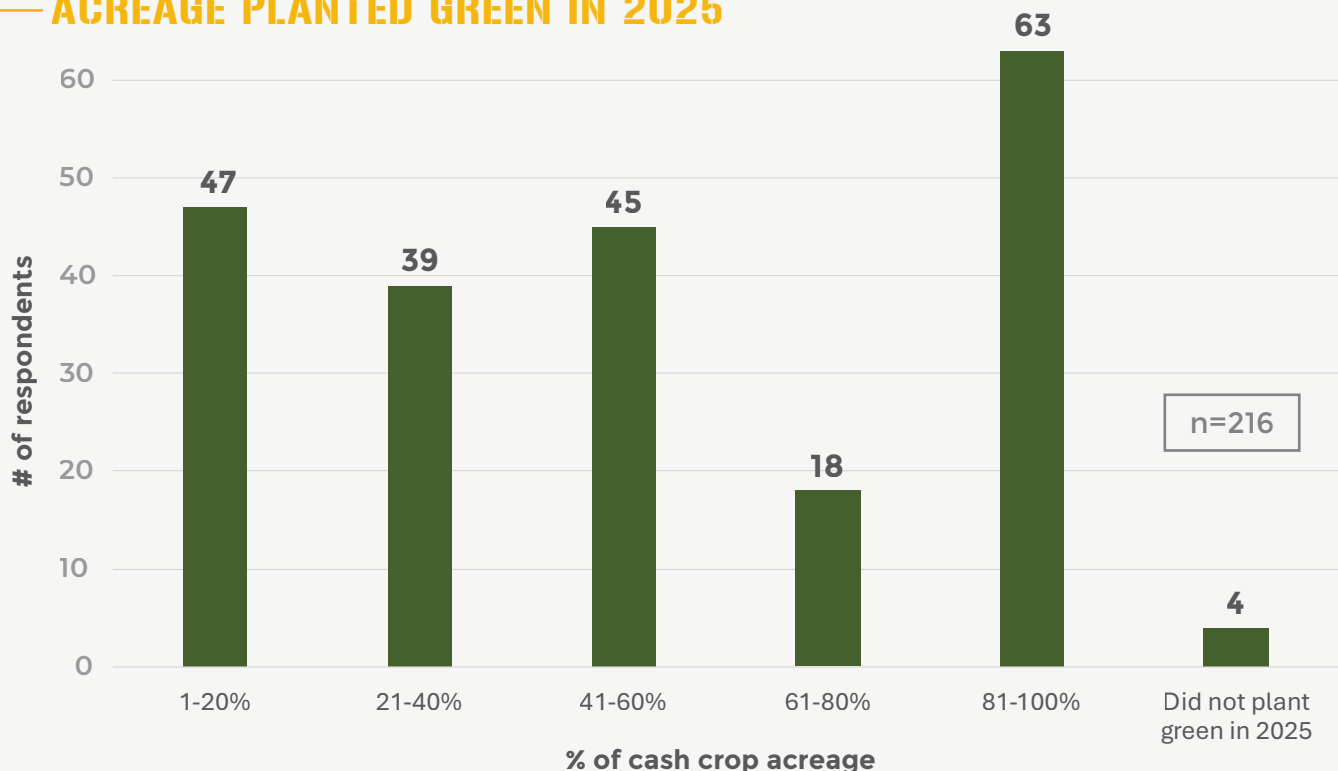
- MORE THAN 75% WHO PLANT GREEN DO SO WITH SOYBEANS -

Planting green—seeding cash crops into an actively growing cover crop—was reported by 218 of 463 cover crop users, or 47.1%. Cross-tabulating planting green with crops grown indicated that the practice is most common among commodity crop growers, 57% of whom planted green in 2025. By contrast, 28.1% of fruit, nut, and vegetable growers planted green.

Though it is not statistically sound to directly compare survey data from different years in the SARE/CTIC/ASTA series, it is interesting to note that the 47.1% is on the high side of the difference between the 39% of growers who reported using the practice when the question was first asked in 2016-2017 and the 52% who reported using it in the 2019-2020 respondent pool. The 57% figure among commodity crop growers is a substantial increase over previous highs.

The percentage of cash crops planted green in 2025 ran the gamut, but a substantial portion of the growers using the practice—63 of 216, or 29.2%—reported employing the practice on 81 to 100% of their cash crops. The smallest group, 18 of 216 (8.3%) planted green with 61 to 80% of their cash crops and 45 growers (20.8%) did it with 41 to 60% of their cash crops. Thirty-nine (18.1%) planted 21 to 40% of their cash crops into covers that had not been terminated yet, and 47 (21.8%) planted green in 1 to 20% of their cash crop. Four (1.9%) said they did not plant green in 2025.

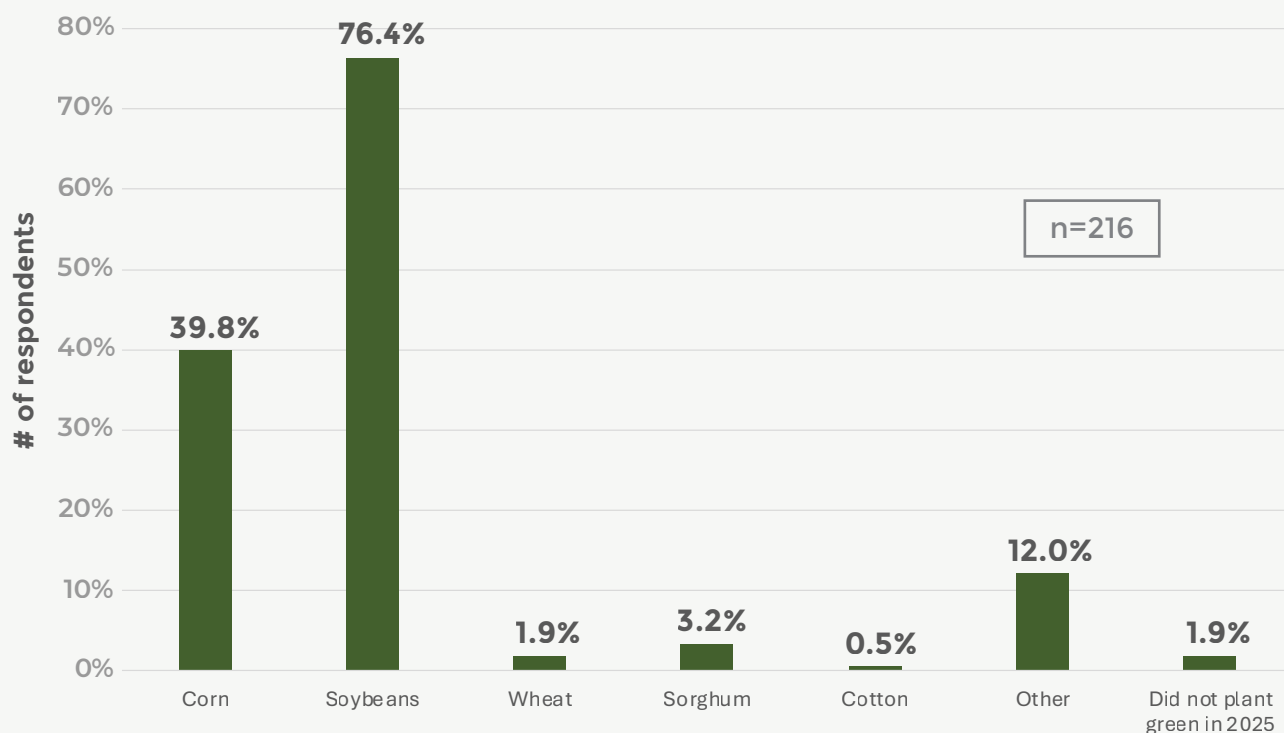
ACREAGE PLANTED GREEN IN 2025



When 216 of those cover crop users who planted green were asked about the primary crop they seeded into living cover crop in 2025, 76.4% (165 growers) chose soybeans and 39.8% (86) selected corn. Sorghum, the third choice, was planted by 3.2% (7), wheat by 1.9% (4), and cotton by 0.5% (1). Four respondents said they did not plant green in 2025, and 26 (12%) wrote in crops under “Other,” including alfalfa, barley, peas and beans, brassicas, cucurbits, ornamentals, and a wide range of vegetables from jicama to squash. Three responses listed grasses: triticale, native warm-season grasses, and native pasture.

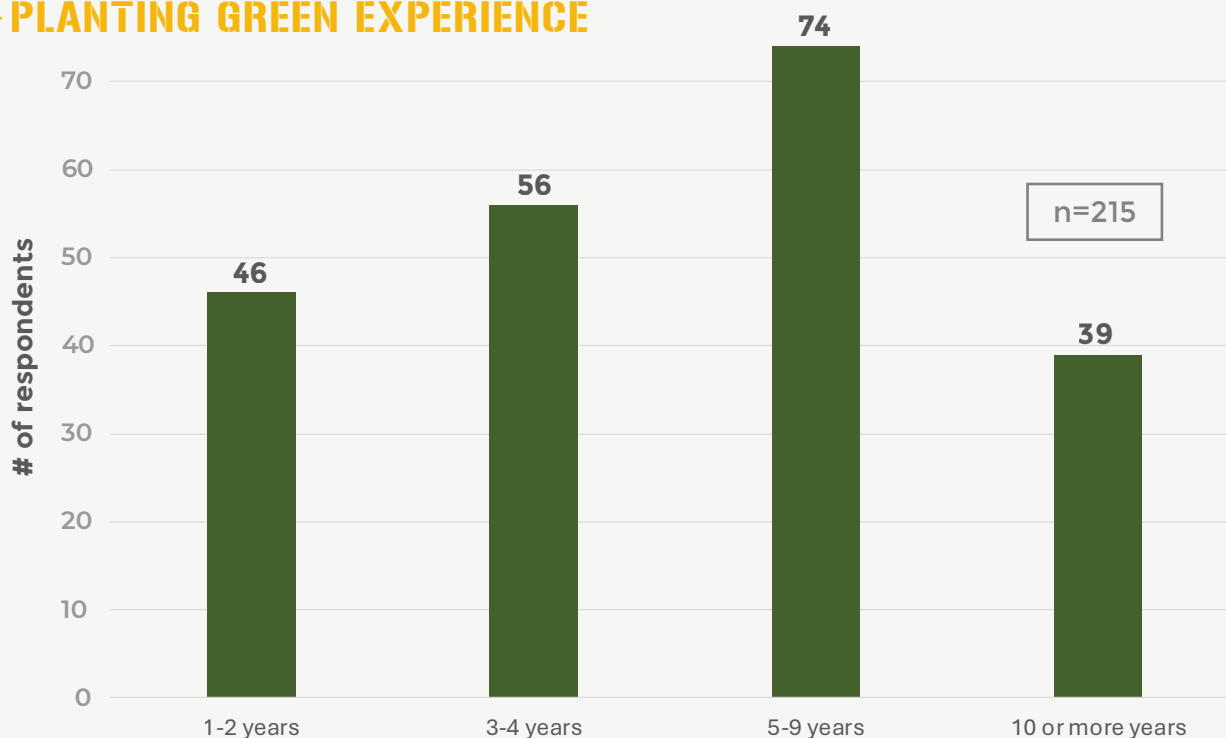
- MORE THAN 75% WHO PLANT GREEN DO SO WITH SOYBEANS -
(CONTINUED)

CROPS PLANTED GREEN IN 2025



The planting green group was evenly split when it comes to experience with the practice. The largest cohort (74 growers of 215 who answered the question, or 34.3%) have been planting green for five to nine years; 39 (18.1%) reported 10 or more years with the practice. Fifty-six cover crop users who planted green (26%) have been doing it for three to four years, and 46 (21.4%) reported one to two years with the practice.

PLANTING GREEN EXPERIENCE



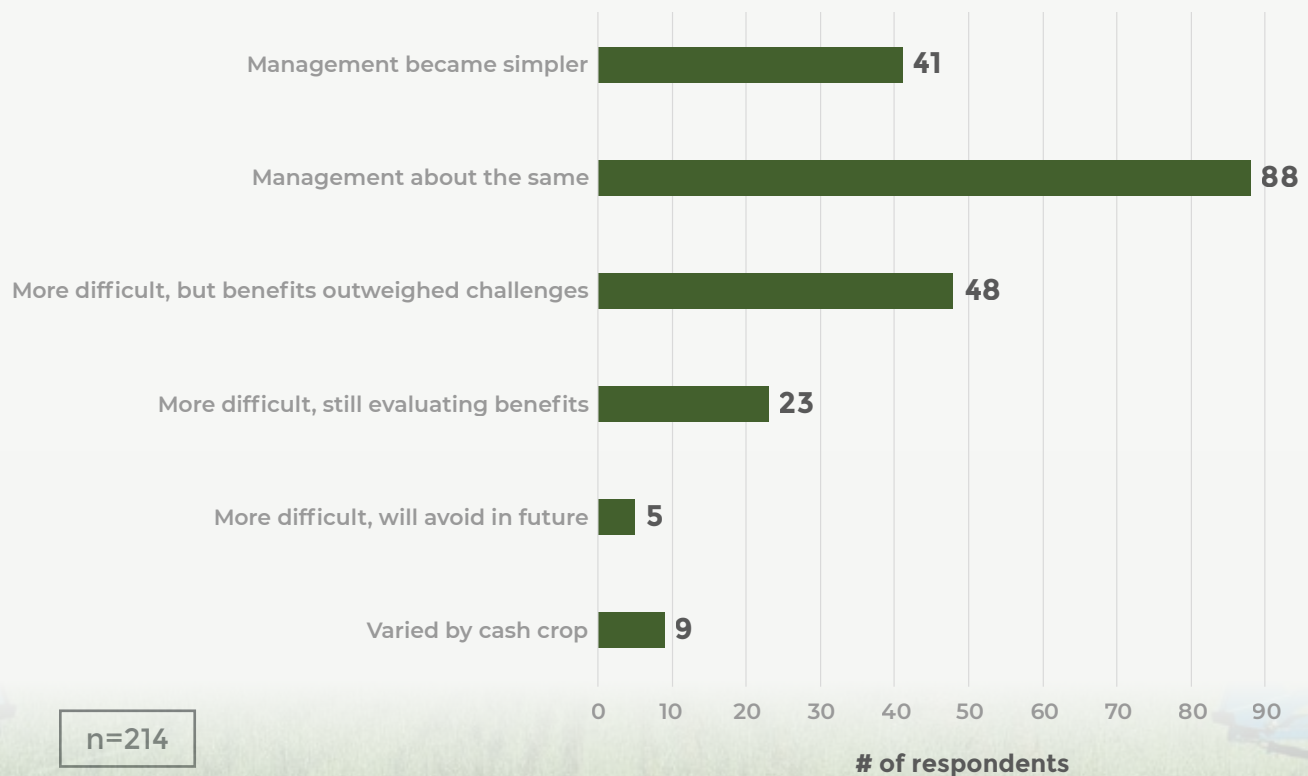
- MORE THAN 75% WHO PLANT GREEN DO SO WITH SOYBEANS - (CONTINUED)

Most cover crop users who plant green view the practice as neutral or beneficial from a management perspective. The largest number, 88 of 214 respondents to the question (41.1%) said management of the cover crop and cash crop in a green planting system was about the same as the alternatives, while 41 (19.2%) said management became simpler. A similar number, 48 (22.4%), said management became more difficult but the benefits outweighed the costs, while 23 (10.7%) said management became more difficult and are still evaluating the benefits. Only five (2.3%) said management became more difficult, and they plan to avoid planting green in the future. Only five (2.3%) said management became more difficult, and they plan to avoid planting green in the future.

Nine (4.2%) selected “Other” and shared practical insights:

- “Corn can be a challenge if rye gets too large. Try to index the rows, terminate early. Soybeans have no issues with large covers.”
- “Planting soybeans earlier while cover is still small. Waiting couple weeks then terminate cover.”
- Limited moisture
- High nitrogen fertilizer costs
- “It’s Kansas so moisture is either too much or too little.”

MANAGEMENT IMPACTS OF PLANTING GREEN



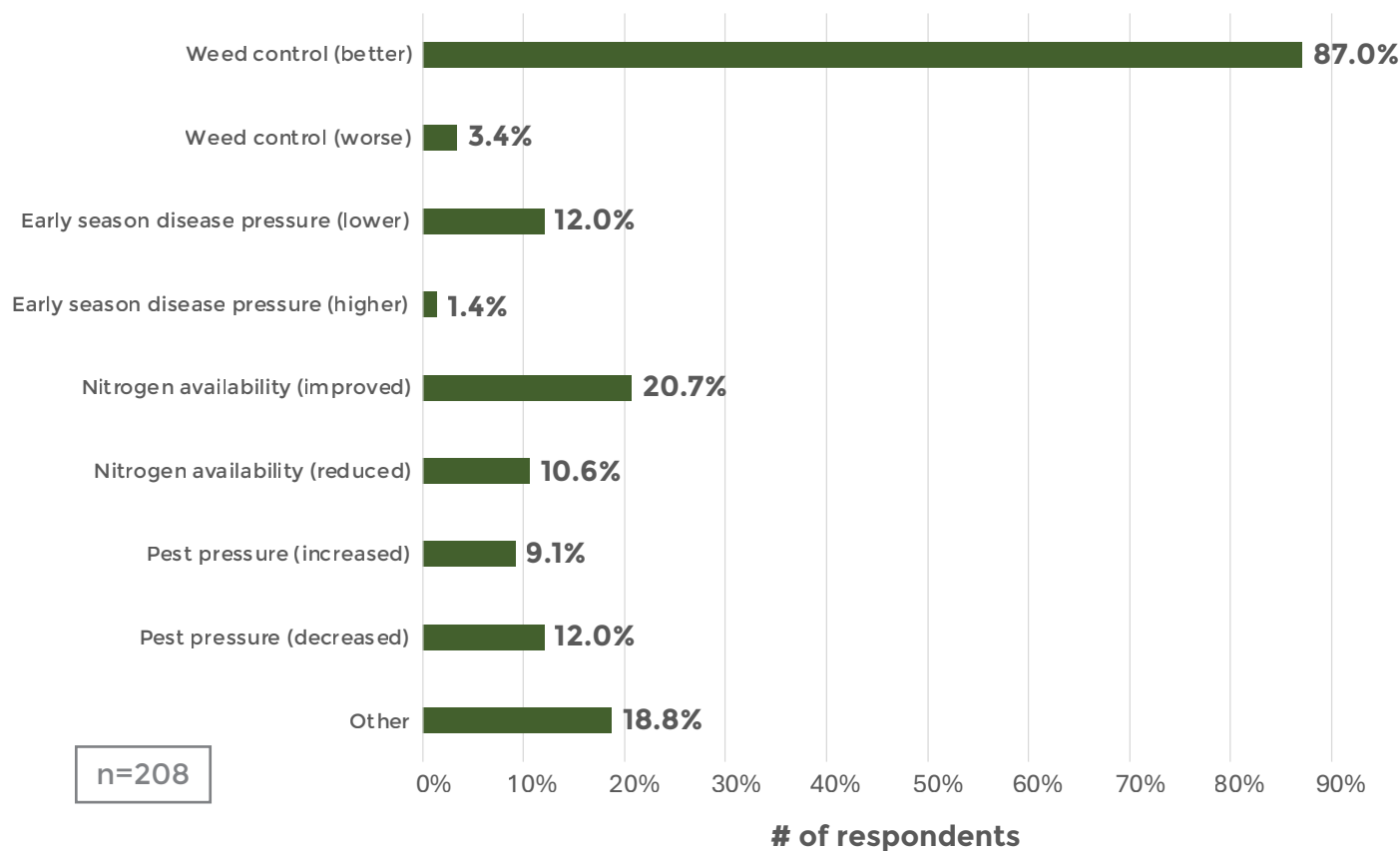
- ALMOST 9 IN 10
WHO PLANT GREEN REPORT
BETTER WEED CONTROL -

87% OF THOSE WHO PLANTED GREEN
ACHIEVED BETTER WEED CONTROL

When asked about the most notable impacts of planting green—and allowed to select up to three of the multiple choice options—a striking 87% of 208 respondents (181 cover crop users who plant green) reported that they achieved better weed control, while 3.4% (7) said their weed control was worse. The second-place answer, at 20.7% (43), was improved nitrogen availability, though it is interesting to note that 10.6% (22) selected reduced nitrogen availability.

An equal number, 12% (25), included decreased pest pressure and lower early-season disease pressure in their top three impacts, while 9.1% (19) reported increased pest pressure and 1.4% (3) said early-season disease pressure was higher after planting green. “Other” was selected by 18.8% (39), but no write-in box was provided to record the impacts they experienced.

IMPACTS OF PLANTING GREEN



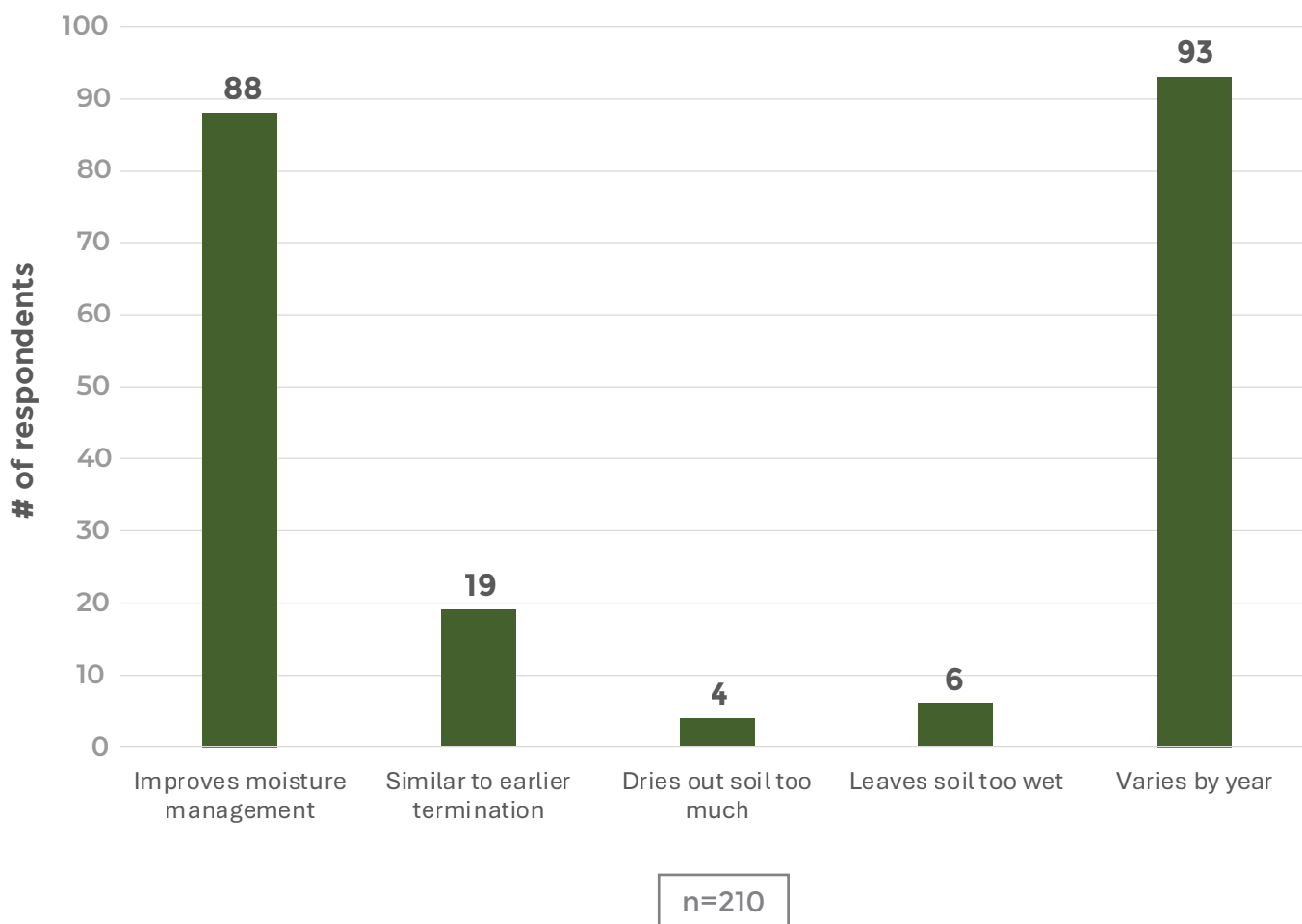
- ALMOST 9 IN 10 WHO PLANT GREEN REPORT BETTER WEED CONTROL - (CONTINUED)



Adding a layer of specificity over previous surveys in the series, this year's survey explored the impacts of planting green on soil moisture at two points in the season: cash crop planting and mid-season.

Four in 10 cover crop users who planted green (88 of 210, or 41.9%) said the practice helps with moisture management at the time of cash crop planting. Four (1.9%) said planting green typically dries out the soil too much at cash crop planting time, six (2.9%) said it typically leaves the soil too wet early in the season, and 19 (9%) said planting-time soil moisture after planting green is similar to levels when the cover crop is terminated before cash crop planting. Ninety-three (44.3%) said it varies by year.

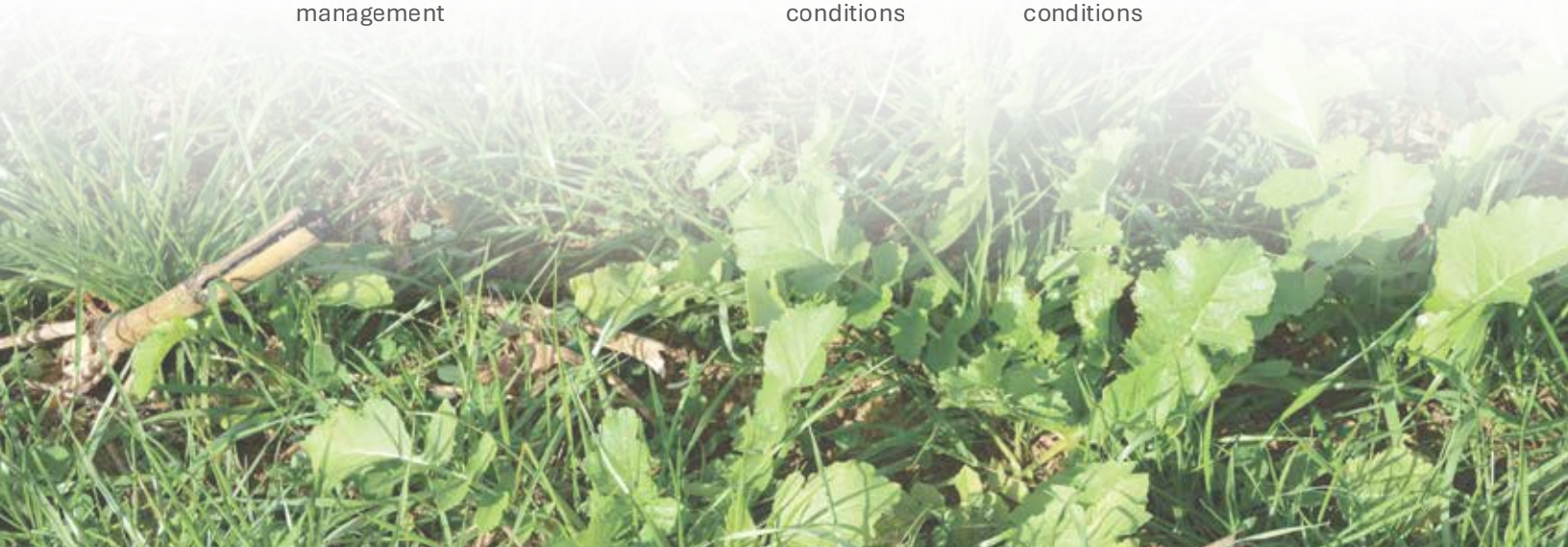
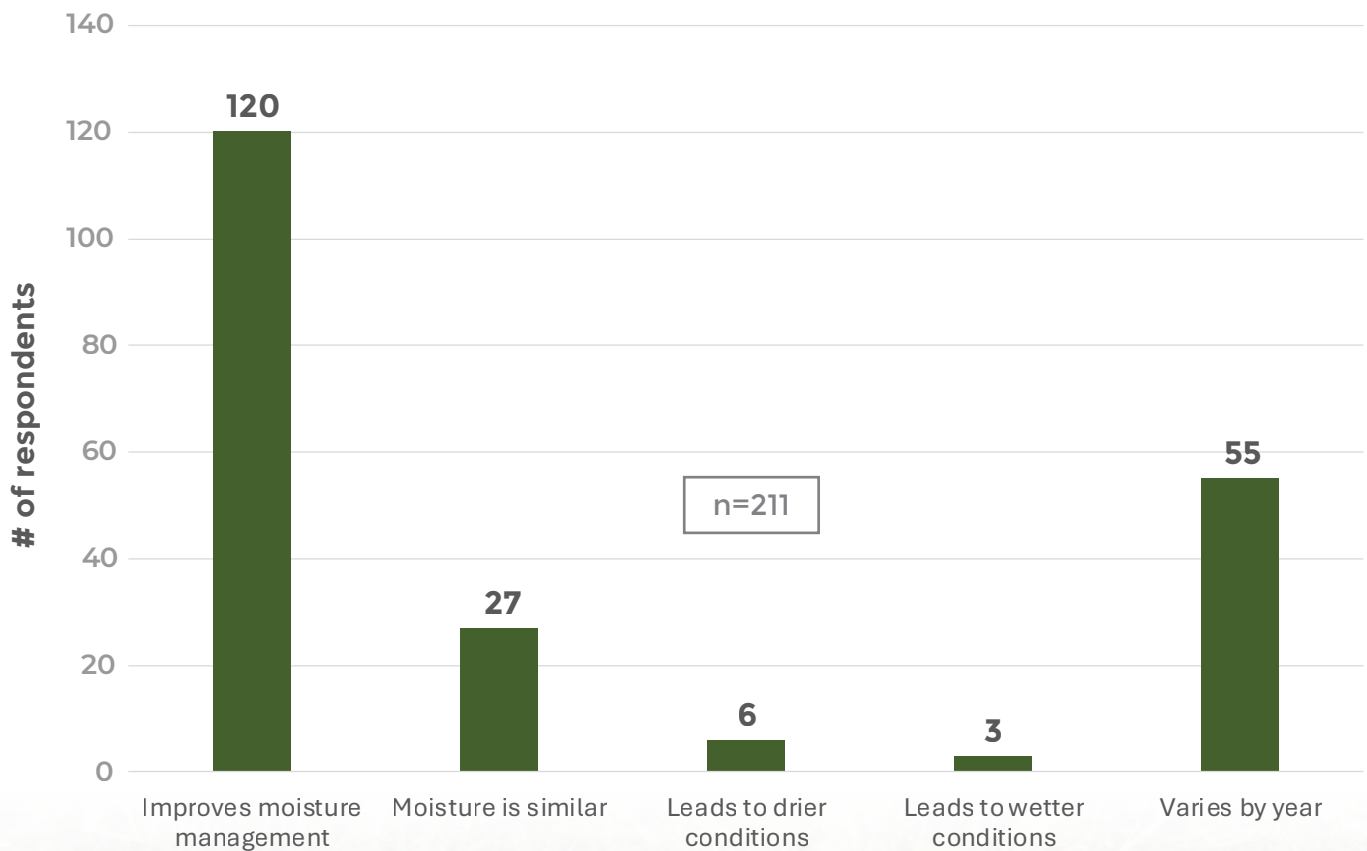
PLANTING GREEN IMPACTS ON SOIL MOISTURE AT PLANTING



- ALMOST 9 IN 10 WHO PLANT GREEN REPORT BETTER WEED CONTROL - (CONTINUED)

More than half of the 211 respondents who planted green and answered a question about mid-season moisture management (120, or 56.9%) said planting green helps, while 27 (12.8%) said mid-season soil moisture was about the same after planting green. Six growers (2.8%) said planting green tends to lead to drier conditions in mid-season, while 3 (1.4%) said the practice tends to lead to wetter conditions. For 56 (26.5%), the effect of planting green on mid-season soil moisture management varies by year.

PLANTING GREEN IMPACTS ON MID-SEASON SOIL MOISTURE



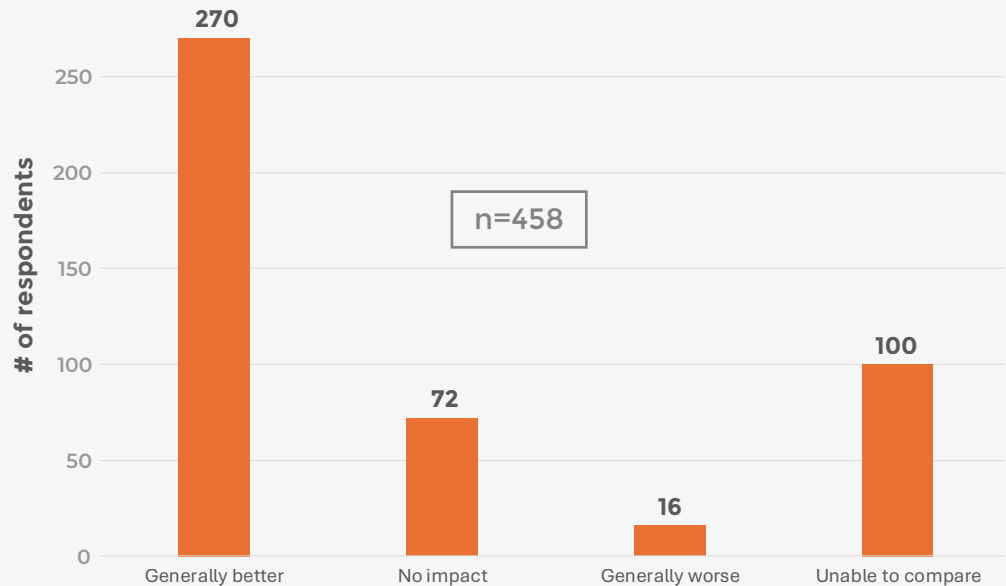
WEED CONTROL

Improved weed control has been a major selling point for cover crops over the years.

- SIX IN 10 REPORT BETTER WEED CONTROL -

COVER CROP IMPACTS ON WEED CONTROL EFFECTIVENESS

Nearly six in ten of the cover crop users in this year's survey—270 of 458, or 58.9%—reported that weed control is generally better in fields that have had cover crops compared to those without, and just 16 (3.5%) said weeds were worse after covers. Seventy-two (15.7%) said cover crops did not impact weed control, and 100 (21.8%) said they were unable to make a comparison.

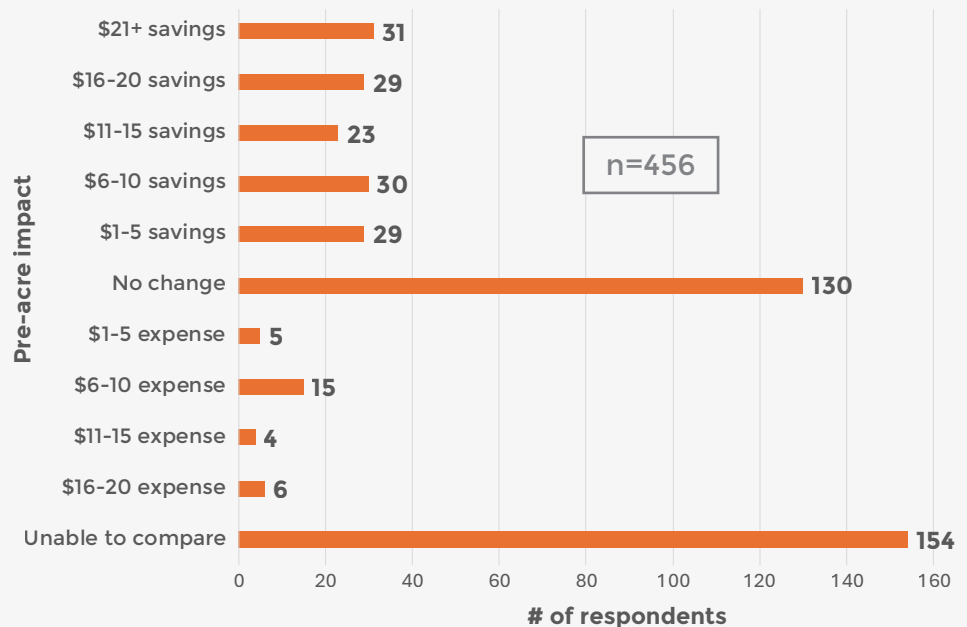


COVER CROP IMPACTS ON WEED CONTROL COSTS

In the 2026 survey, responses among growers who noticed a change in herbicide cost between cover cropped and non-cover fields leaned toward the savings side of the spectrum. Thirty-one of 456 cover crop users (6.8%) said they saved more than \$21 per acre on herbicides after cover crops, 29 (6.4%) said they saved \$16 to \$20 an acre, 23 (5%) reported saving \$11 to \$15 per acre, 30 (6.6%) placed savings between \$6 and \$10 an acre, and 29 (6.4%) figured the improvement in weed control cost was \$1 to \$5. In all, 31.2%, or nearly one in three respondents to the question, saw a cost savings on herbicide following cover crops.

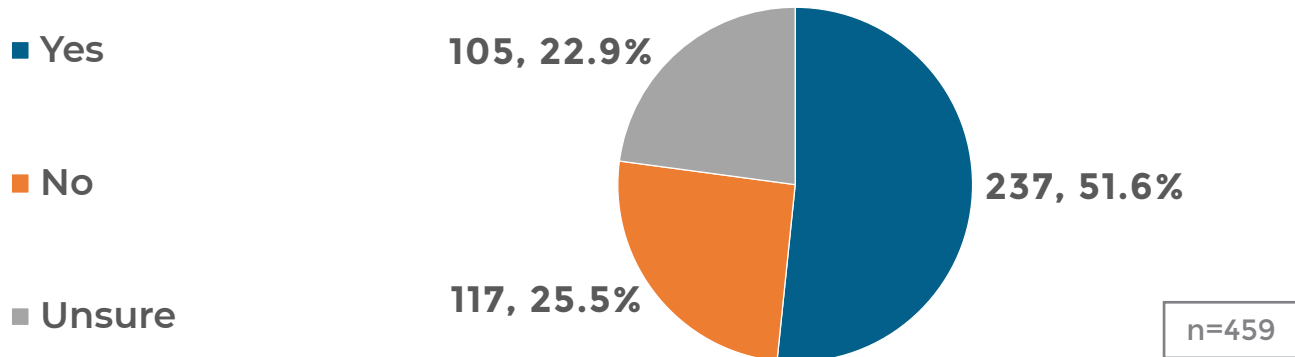
On the other side of the line, five growers (1.1%) reported a \$1 to \$5 per acre increase in herbicide costs, 15 (3.3%) spent \$6 to \$10 per acre more, four (0.9%) spent an extra \$11 to \$15, and six (1.3%) spent \$16 to \$20 more on herbicide following their cover crops.

However, by far the largest group—130 (28.5%)—reported no change in herbicide costs between cover cropped and non-cover cropped fields, and 154 (33.8%) said they were unable to make a comparison.



Half of the respondents in this year's cover crop group—237 of 459, or 51.6%—reported having herbicide-resistant weeds on their farms, while 105 (22.9%) said they were not sure and 117 (25.5%) reported that they did not have resistant weeds.

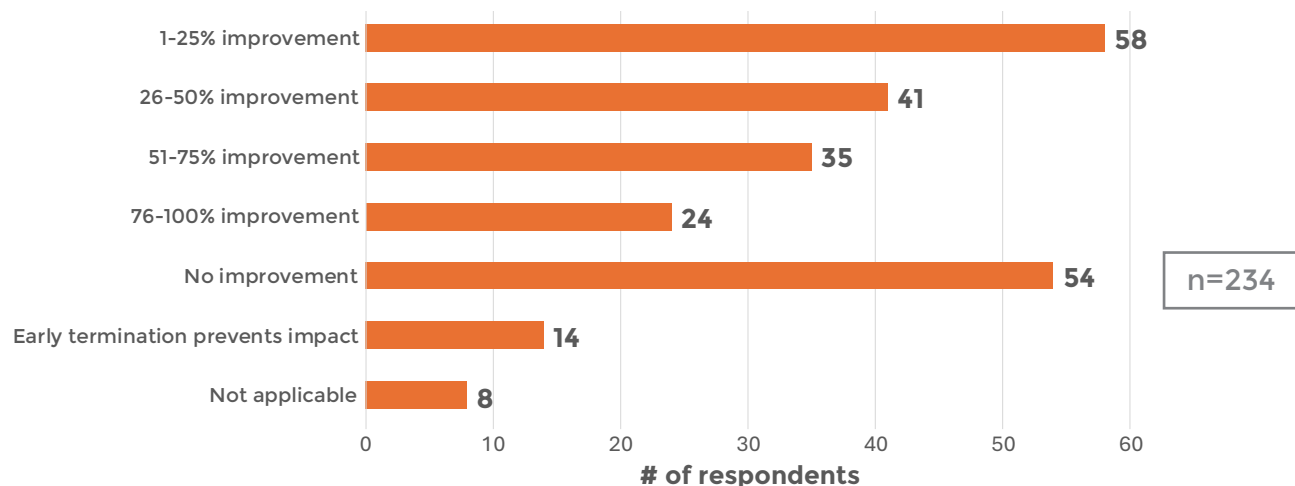
PRESENCE OF HERBICIDE-RESISTANT WEEDS



Respondents with herbicide-resistant weeds were directed to a question about the impact of cover crops on controlling those problem populations. A majority of 234 respondents reported improved control of resistant weeds—58 (24.8%) said they experienced 1 to 25% better control after a good cover crop stand and spring growth, 41 (15.5%) saw a 26-to-50% improvement, 35 (14.9%) reported 51 to 75% better control, and 24 (10.3%) said control of herbicide-resistant weeds was 76 to 100% better after a good cover crop. In all, that represents 65.5% of the group.

One in four respondents with herbicide-resistant weeds (54, or 23.1%) said they had not seen any improvement in control from cover crops, 14 (5.9%) said they terminate too early to affect weed control, and eight (3.4%) said the question is not applicable to their operations.

COVER CROP IMPACTS ON CONTROL OF HERBICIDE-RESISTANT WEEDS



Among 151 respondents who reported improved weed control after cover crops, the effects were noted in waterhemp (cited by 92, or 60.9%), marehail/horseweed (36, or 23.8%) and palmer amaranth (18, or 11.9%). Giant ragweed (9/5.9%), kochia (8/5.3%), and pigweed (7/4.6%) garnered almost equal numbers of mentions. Other herbicide-resistant weeds whose control was improved by cover crops included thistle (4/2.6%); fleabane, Italian ryegrass, and winter annuals at two mentions (1.3%) apiece; and one mention each of broadleaves, grasses, bindweed, nutsedge, nettle, and hemp dogbane.

DRONES

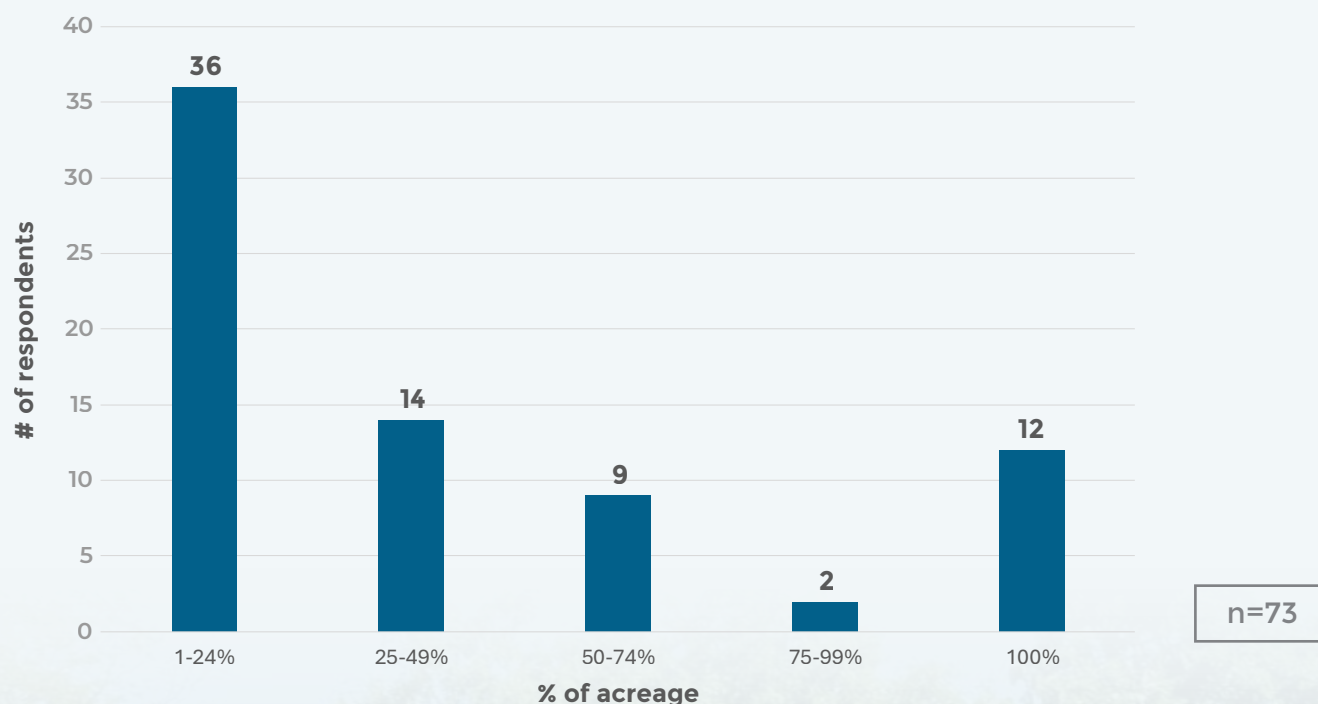
Drones are a growing tool in agriculture, and the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are finding their place in cover crop management. For the first time, the SARE/CTIC/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey dug into drone use among cover crop users.

- RISE OF THE DRONES -

Among 459 cover crop users, just 13 (2.8%) reported using their own drones for cover crop seeding, but a more substantial 62 growers (13.5%) said they hired a drone pilot to seed cover crops.

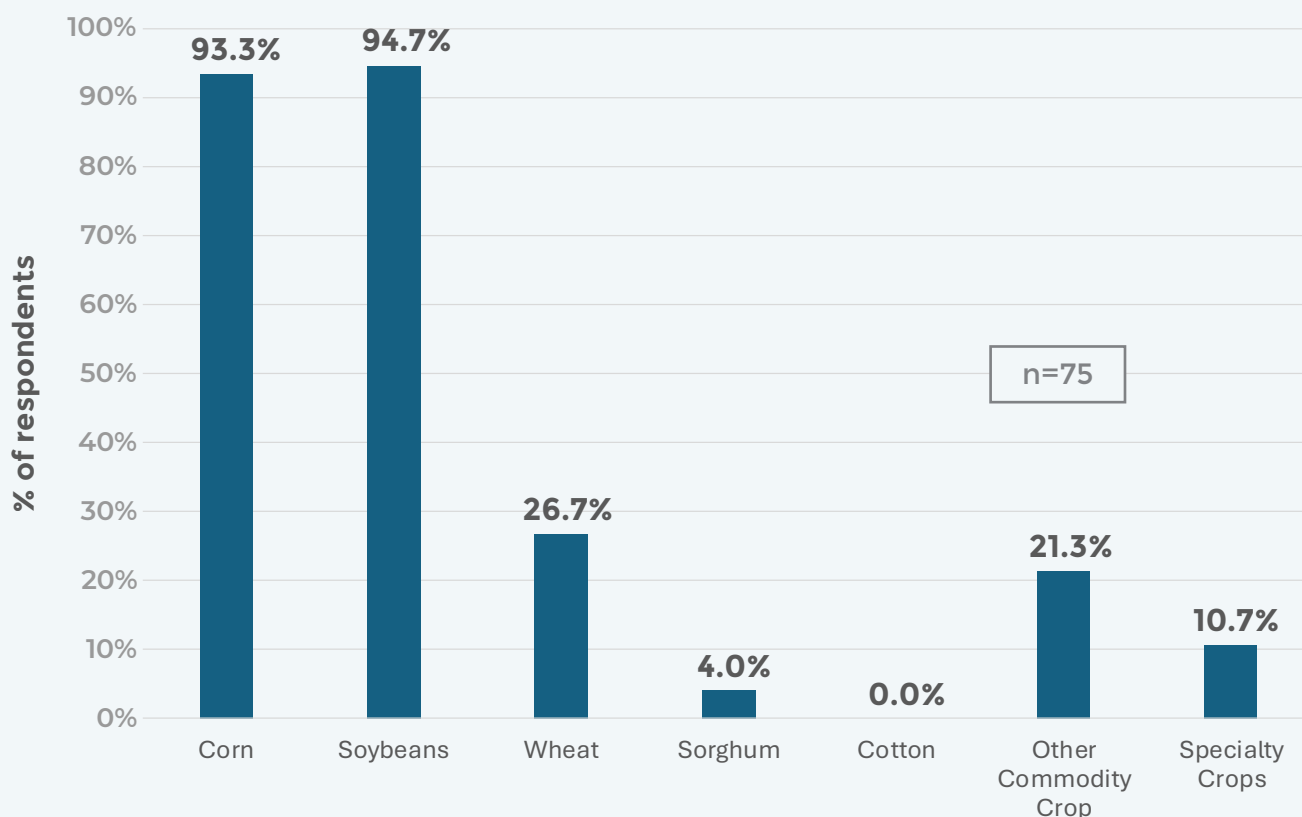
Drone seeding appears to be in its tryout phase among users, with half of the growers who owned or hired cover crop seeding by drone—36 of 73, or 49.3%—using the practice on one to 24% of their cover crop acres. Fourteen (19.2%) drone-seeded 25 to 49% of their cover crop acres, nine (12.3%) used drones to seed 50 to 74% of their acreage, and two (2.7%) applied cover crop seed on 75 to 99% of their acreage. Twelve (16.4%) of the drone users seeded 100% of their cover crop acres with a UAV.

COVER CROP ACREAGE SEEDED BY DRONE



The largest numbers of drone users reported producing soybeans (94.7% of 75 respondents, or 71 growers) and corn (93.3%, or 70). Wheat was a distant third with 26.7% of drone users growing the crop, or 20 growers. Sorghum producers accounted for 4% (three), while 21.3% (16) reported producing other commodity crops. Specialty crops were produced by 10.7% (eight) drone users. These figures do not indicate the crops in which the drones were used, but—in contrast to fact that roughly two-thirds of the total respondent pool in the survey produced commodity crops—provide a sense that drone use is currently more popular among growers of corn and soybeans.

CROPS GROWN AMONG RESPONDENTS USING DRONES FOR SEEDING

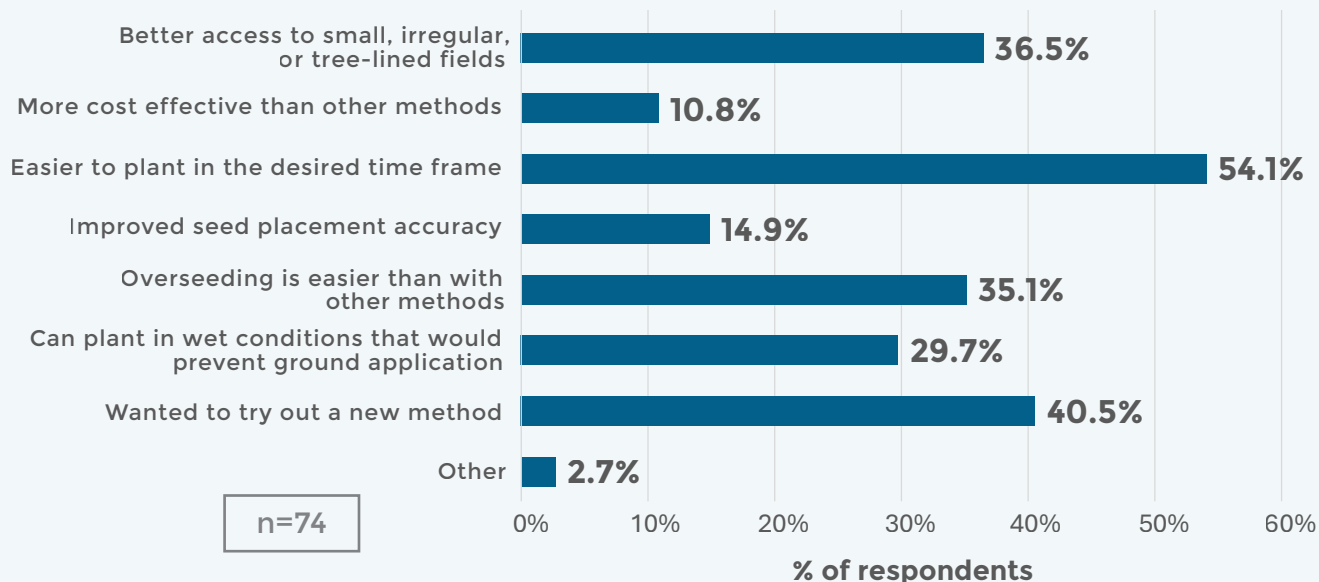


The versatile aircraft are building a fan base for speed and convenience as payloads increase with larger units built specifically for agriculture. Asked to select as many answers as they liked, half of the drone users (40 of 73, or 54%) noted that drones make it easier to plant in the desired time frame. Thirty (40.5%) said they wanted to try out a new method, while “Better access to small, irregular, or tree-lined fields” and “Overseeding is easier with a drone than with other methods” drew almost identical numbers of users, with 27/36.5% and 26/35.1% respectively.

The ability to plant in conditions too wet for ground equipment drew 22 users (29.7%). Improved seed placement accuracy appealed to 11 (14.9%), and eight (10.8%) said drones were more cost-effective than other seeding methods.

Two drone users selected “Other.” One noted that drone seeding allowed experimentation with other [cover crop] species, and the other simply wrote, “It’s fun.”

REASONS FOR DRONE SEEDING

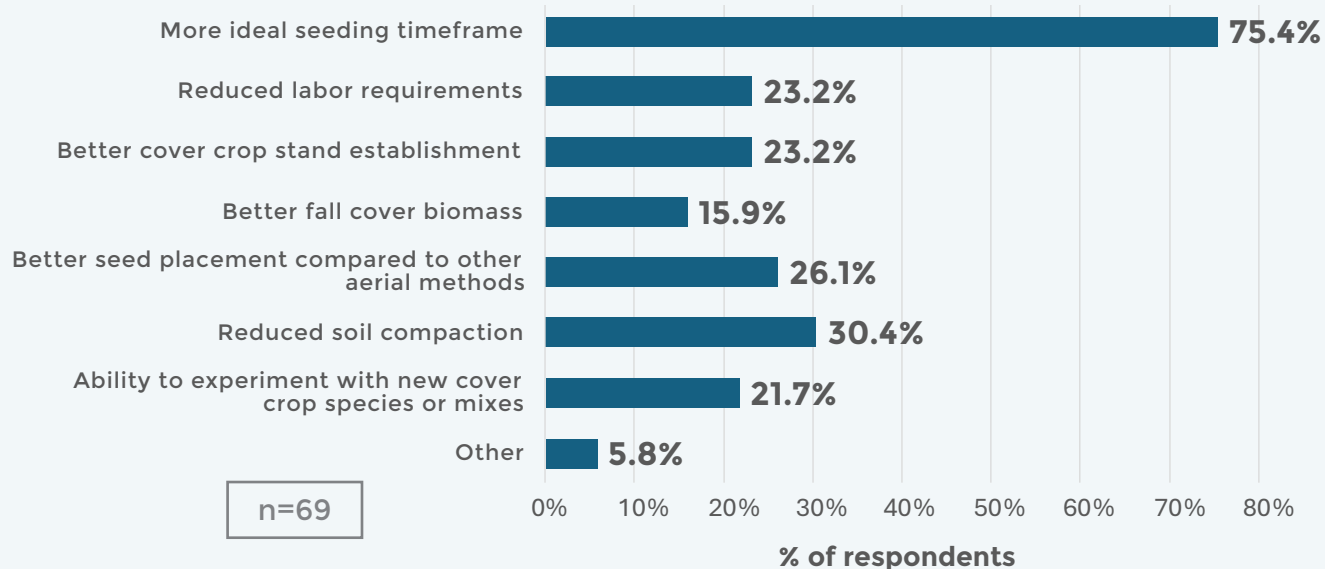


Zeroing in on the benefits of using drones for cover crop seeding—another “select all that apply” question—timing was far and away the most popular answer. Fifty-two of 69 respondents (75.4%) said drones allow a more ideal seeding timeframe. The second-most-popular answer, reduced soil compaction, was selected by 21 (30.4%), followed by 18 (26.1%) who chose “Better seed placement compared to other aerial methods.”

Equal numbers of respondents—16 drone users, or 23.2%—noted better cover crop stand establishment and reduced labor requirements. The ability to experiment with new cover crop species or mixes attracted 15 (21.7%) replies, and better fall cover biomass appealed to 11 (15.9%).

Not all the answers were positive. Four growers wrote in answers for “Other.” One had purchased but not yet used a drone. Stand establishment was an issue for two of the respondents: “Have not been able to get a stand with the drone and balansa clover,” wrote one, while the other wrote, “Worse germination.” The final write-in grower noted, “Works with irregular field edges but the stand is generally not good.”

DRONE SEEDING BENEFITS



The subsequent multiple-choice question delved into challenges or drawbacks of using drones for seeding cover crops, and “Stand establishment issues” was selected by 47%. Related options—“Difficulty achieving uniform seed spread” and “Delays because the drone operator is busy or unavailable” both rated 19.1%, and “Problems with certain mixes spreading evenly” (14.7%) were also noted.

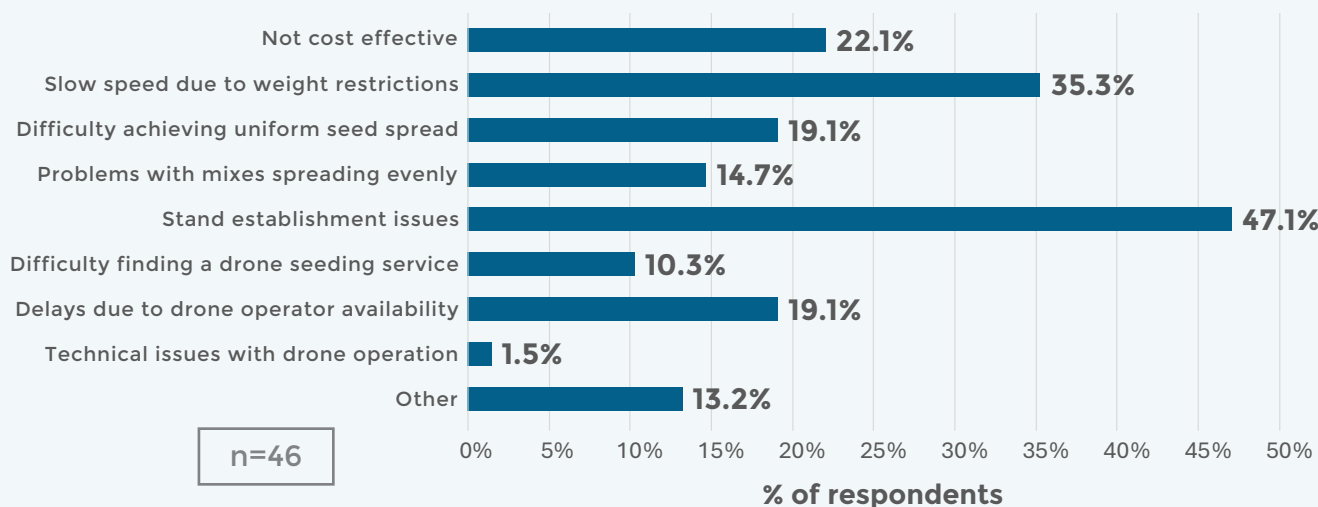
One in three drone users (35.3%) pointed to slow speed of the process due to weight restrictions. Twenty-two percent said seeding with drones was not cost-effective, while 19.1% cited delays because drone operators were unavailable and 10.3% said they had difficulty finding a drone seeding service.

Just 1.5% reported technical issues with drone operation. Of the 13.2% who wrote in answers under “Other,” capacity was the recurring theme in three variations including: “Too light of rate and poor battery setup,” wrote one user, while another mentioned lower volume and the third pointed out that drone users cannot fertilize while simultaneously spreading cover crop seed.

One grower wrote, “Cannot seed close enough to tree lines and powerlines,” while another’s note helped explain: “It is a mess when they crash into electric fences that pilot did not see.”

In addition to piloting challenges, there is still much more to learn about drones as cover crop seeding tools. “Moisture is key,” advised one user. One wrote that there were no drawbacks, another said, “Still learning,” and a third wrote, “Unknown.”

DRONE SEEDING CHALLENGES



Digging deeper into drone downsides, the final drone question asked UAV users to identify the factors that limit the use of drones for cover crop seeding on their operations. The top themes among the open-ended answers—given by 15 of 46 respondents (32.6%)—were stand or establishment issues, followed by cost (11/23.9%) and payload or capacity restraints (21.7%). Operator time constraints were noted by three (6.5%). Two (4.3%) said they don’t own a drone.

Other responses pointed out that limitations depended on the species being planted (which accounted for three of the write-ins, as well as one who noted that drones were not needed for cereal rye), lack of competition, settings in the drones that avoid too many obstacles, and lack of competition—presumably among drone services.

Nine respondents (19.6% of the 46) said there were no limiting factors.

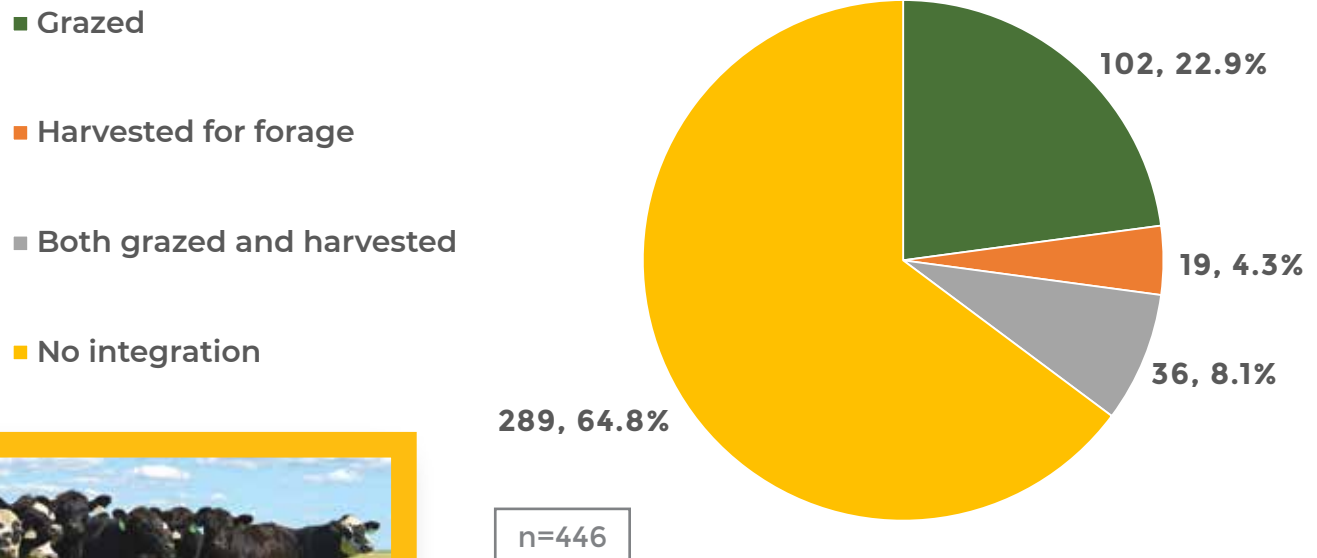
GRAZING COVER CROPS

- FALL GRAZING FOR INTEGRATED LIVESTOCK OPERATIONS SHOWS POTENTIAL -

For many producers, integrating livestock may be a way to take cover crops to a new level. Livestock show promise in creating added value from cover crop biomass, as well as in helping improve soil health through manure. Even farmers who are not eager to manage livestock themselves can tap into the value animals bring to a cover crop system by teaming up with livestock producers.

Among 446 cover crop users, 102 (22.9%) reported that their cover crops were integrated with livestock—either theirs or someone else’s—in 2025. Nineteen growers (4.3%) said they harvested cover crops for forage, and 36 (8.1%) both grazed and harvested cover crops.

COVER CROPS AND LIVESTOCK INTEGRATION



- LIVESTOCK OWNERSHIP -

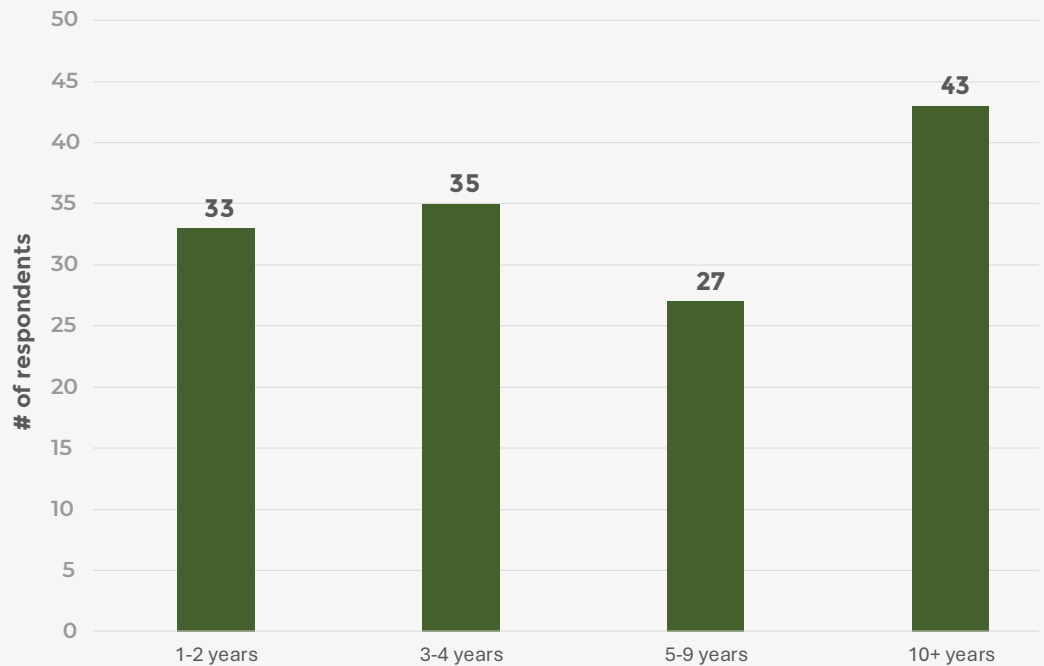
At this stage, the vast majority of livestock in cover crop systems were owned by the cover crop user—84.8%, or 117 of 138 respondents, reported that the livestock that fed on their cover crops were part of their operation and one who chose a write-in answer indicated that a relative owned the animals. For 15.2% (21), livestock were part of a neighbor’s operation, and in 4.4% (6) of the cases, the livestock were owned by a third party. The six producers who engage in grazing contracts with third parties described three systems for payment. Two collected a payment based on days of grazing per head, one arranged a payment based on weight gain, two charged a flat fee per acre, and one did not charge for grazing.



YEARS OF COVER CROP GRAZING EXPERIENCE

Of 138 producers who graze their cover crops, 43 (31.2%) had 10 years or more experience with the practice, 27 (19.6%) reported five to nine years of experience, 35 (25.4%) had three to four years, and 33 (23.9%) had 1 to 2 years of grazing on their covers.

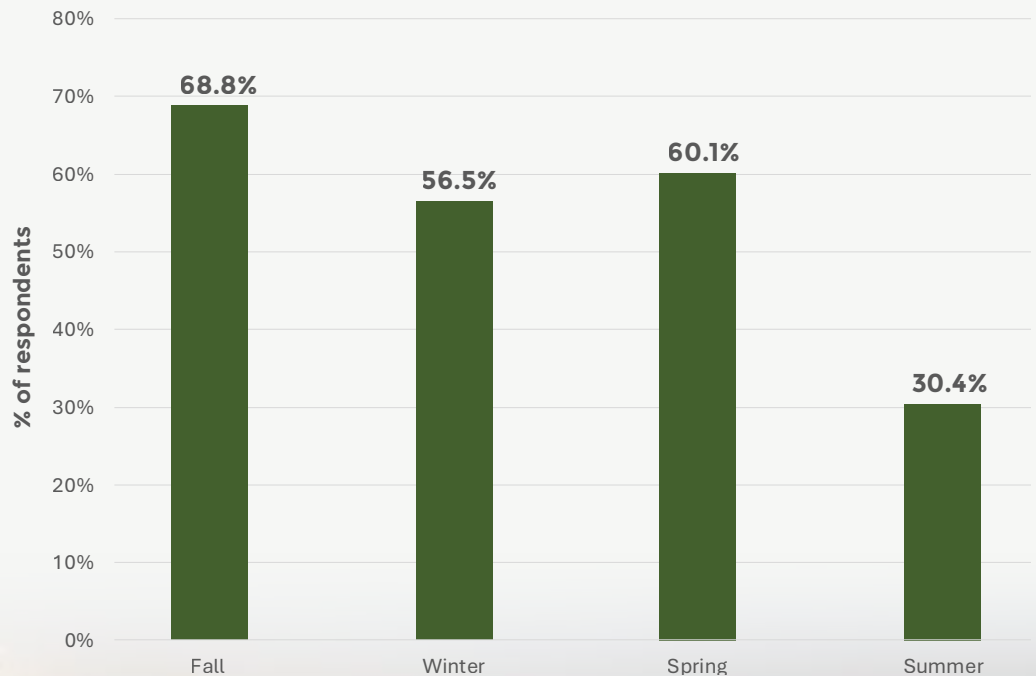
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TIMING OF COVER CROP GRAZING

Cover crops are most often grazed in the fall. According to 138 producers who apply the practice—68.8% (95 growers) reported fall grazing of covers, followed by 60.1% (83) in the spring, 56.5% (78) in the winter and 30.4% (42) grazing in the summer.

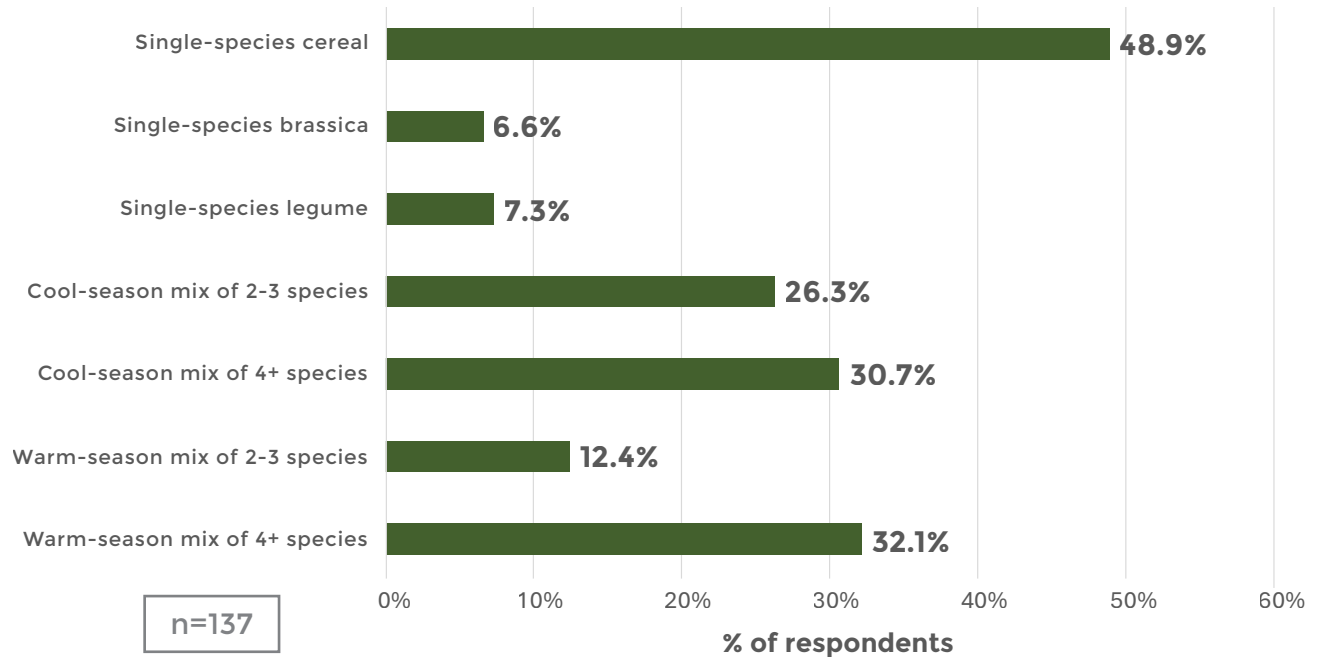
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- SPECIES—PLANT AND ANIMAL -

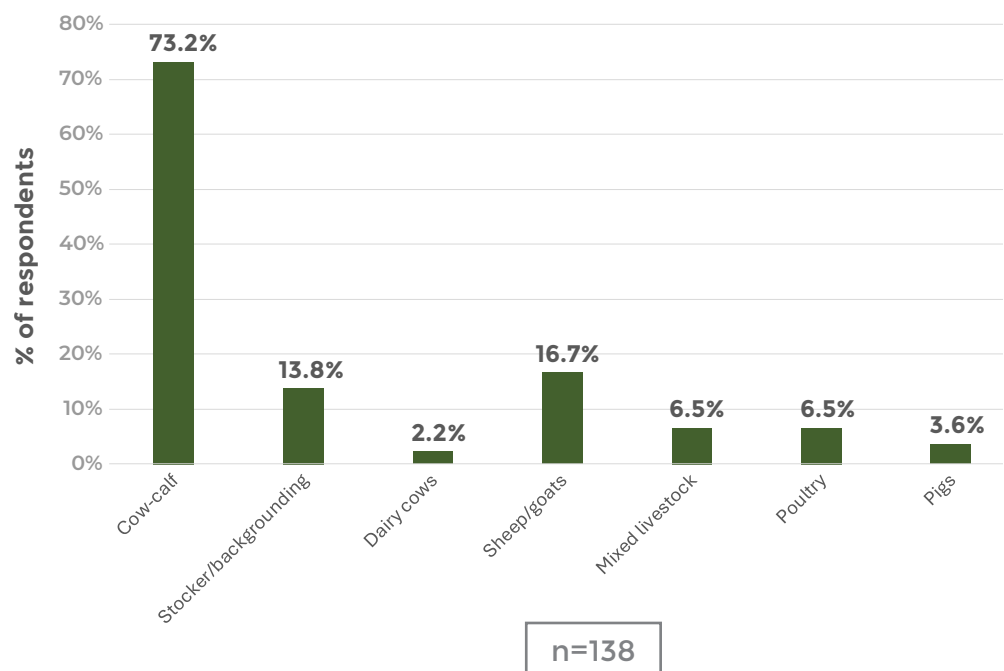
Single-species cereal cover crops—such as rye, wheat, triticale, barley, or oats—are most popular for grazing, with 48.9% (67 of 137 respondents) listing them. Warm-season mixes with four or more species are second-most-popular for grazing with 32.1% of the responses (44), followed closely by cool-season mixes of four or more species (30.7%/42) and cool-season mixes of two to three species, grazed by 26.3% (36). Warm-season mixes were reported containing two-to-three species by 12.4% (17), single-species legumes like clovers or vetch by 7.3% (10), and single-species brassica covers—such as radishes, turnips, or rapeseed—by 6.6% (nine).

COVER CROPS USED FOR GRAZING



LIVESTOCK GRAZING COVER CROPS

Cow-calf pairs were by far the most popular livestock turned out on cover crops, with 73.2% of 101 respondents who grazed their covers; sheep and goats came in second with 16.7% (23), followed closely by stocker/backgrounding cattle at 13.8% (19). Poultry and mixed livestock were each identified by 6.5% (9), pigs by 3.6% (five), and dairy cows by 2.2% (three).

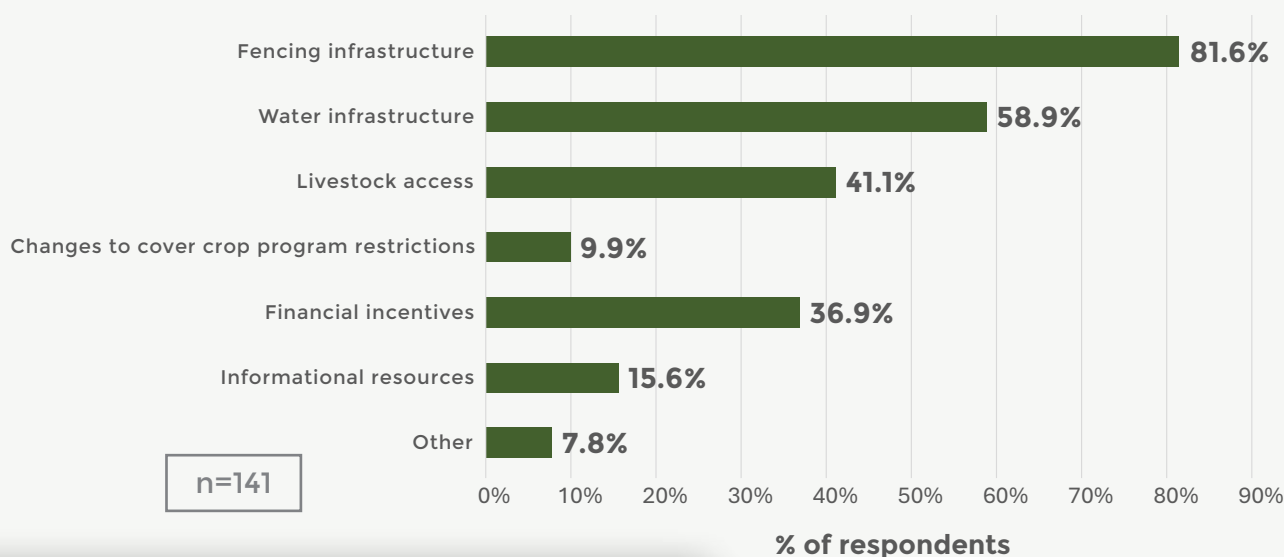


Grazing cover crops is a practice with potential for growth. Among 285 cover crop users who answered “No” to the grazing or harvesting question, 55 (19.3%) indicated they would be interested in grazing cover crops in the future and 89 (31.2%) said “Maybe.”

Of those growers who said “Yes” or “Maybe” to grazing in the future, the vast majority—81.6%, or 115 of 141 respondents—identified fencing infrastructure as a need to address before they could adopt grazing. Water infrastructure came in as the second-most-important need, identified by 58.9% (83 producers). Livestock access was noted by 41.1% (58), financial incentives to try grazing were suggested by 36.9% (52), and 15.6% (22) said they needed informational resources. One in 10—9.9%, or 14 respondents—suggested changes to the cover crop program would be necessary before they could try grazing.

Eleven producers selected “Other” and shared needs including financial assistance, reduced liability, earlier planting so cover crops would be ready to graze in December, and concerns over weed pressure on soft, compaction-prone ground. Structural challenges included the need to start a livestock business and getting the next generation involved in the venture.

RESOURCES NEEDED TO ADOPT COVER CROP GRAZING



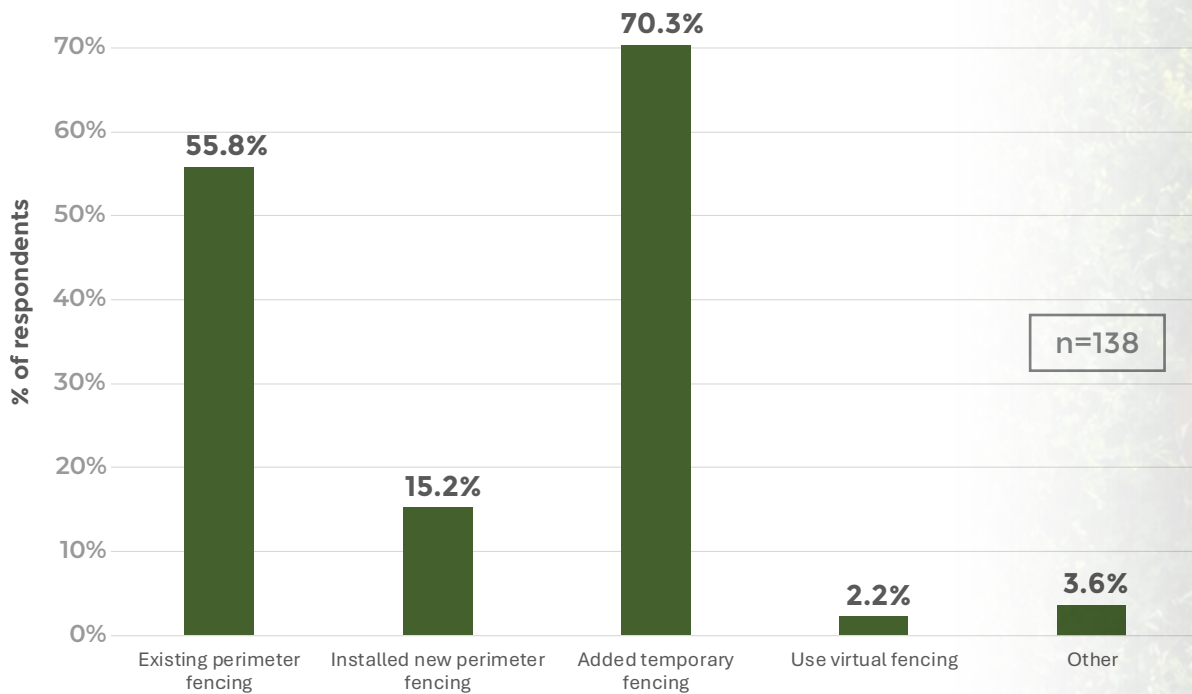
- VIRTUAL FENCING COULD DRIVE ADDITIONAL COVER CROP ACRES -

Asked how they manage fencing for grazing cover crops, 70.3% of 138 respondents (97 growers) said they added temporary fencing, 55.8% (77) used existing perimeter fencing, and 15.2% (21) installed new perimeter fencing. Virtual fencing was installed by 2.2% (three), and five respondents used the write-in box under “Other” to describe a rotational grazing system (presumably with temporary cross-fencing), a grower who has the cattle owner set up a hot-wire fence, a combination of moveable fence and tying animals to posts, and a combination of electrical fencing for pigs and virtual fencing for sheep and cattle.

Finally, one respondent wrote that they were developing enclosures to allow livestock grazing around the perimeter of a parcel while protecting sensitive perennial crops from damage.

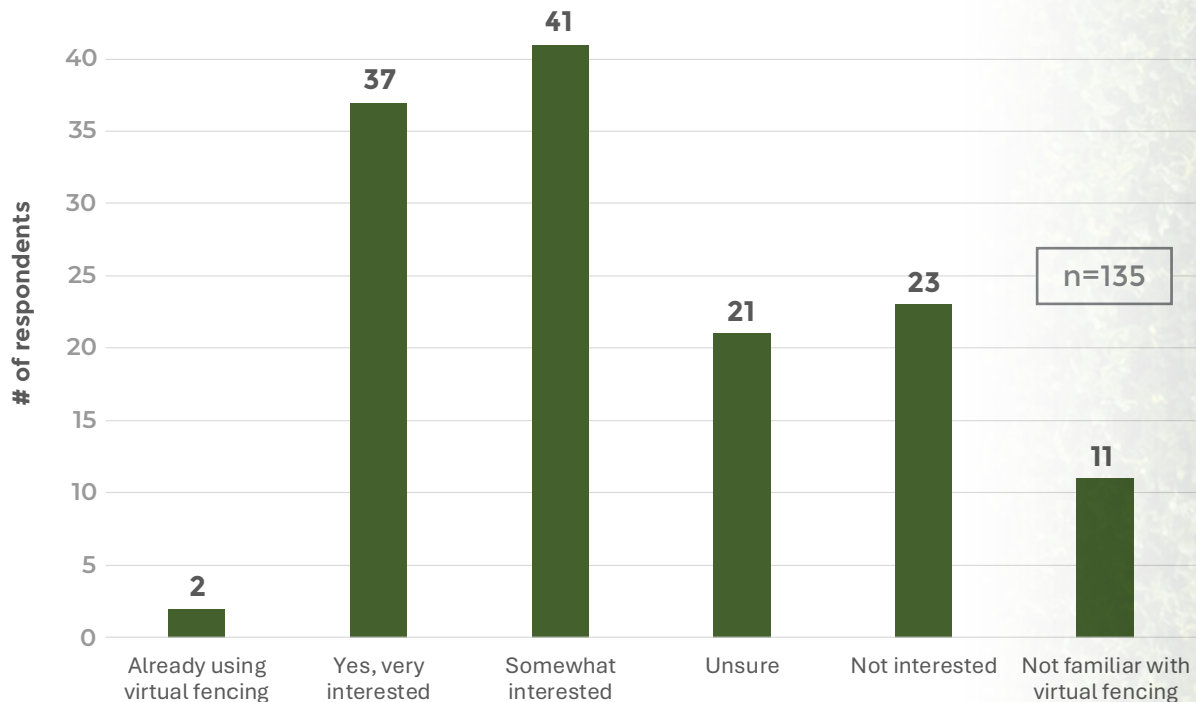
- VIRTUAL FENCING COULD DRIVE ADDITIONAL COVER CROP ACRES - (CONTINUED)

RESOURCES NEEDED TO ADOPT COVER CROP GRAZING



Virtual fencing, which influences animal behavior through sounds and electrical shocks on a special GPS collar triggered by map boundaries, may present a useful option for producers who want to graze their cover crops. Among 135 growers who graze cover crops, two (1.5%) said they were already using virtual fencing, 37 (27.4%) were very interested in using virtual fencing for cover crop grazing, 41 (30.4%) were somewhat interested, and 21 (15.6%) said they were unsure. Twenty-three (17%) said they were uninterested in using virtual fencing in cover crop grazing systems, and 11 (8.1%) were not familiar with the technology.

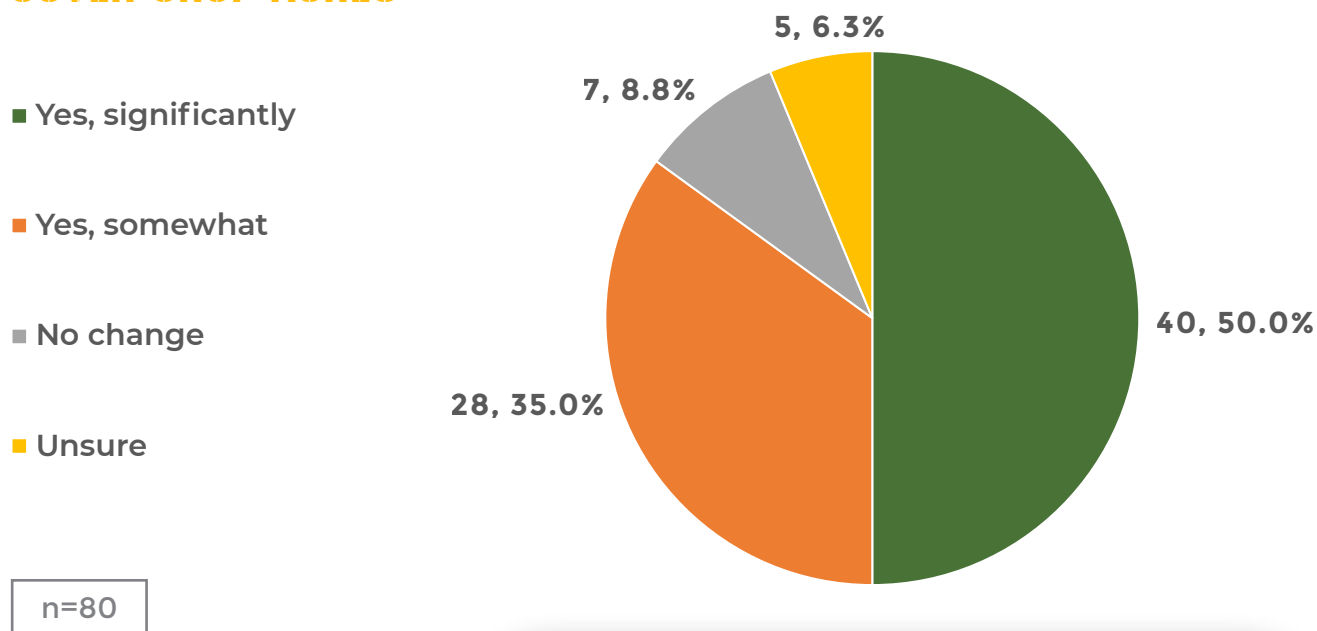
RESOURCES NEEDED TO ADOPT COVER CROP GRAZING



- VIRTUAL FENCING COULD DRIVE ADDITIONAL COVER CROP ACRES - (CONTINUED)

The survey indicated that virtual fencing could make grazing cover crops more appealing to growers as they learn more about the technology. Among the 80 producers who said they were already using virtual fencing or were very or somewhat interested in trying it, 40 (50%) said they would be inclined to significantly increase their cover crop grazing if virtual fencing proves to be labor saving and economical. Twenty-eight (35%) said they would be “somewhat” likely to increase grazing covers under those conditions, seven (8.8%) would expect no change in their grazing acreage as a result, and five (6.3%) were unsure.

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF VIRTUAL FENCING ON EXPANDING COVER CROP ACRES

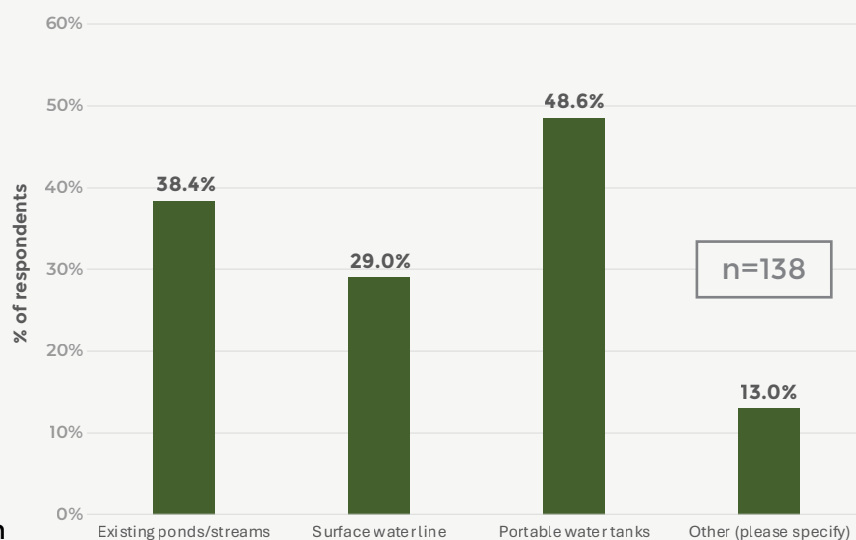


- WATER IS A CHALLENGE -

WATER SOURCES FOR COVER CROP GRAZING

Responses in the survey show that water availability is a hurdle for many producers and needs to be addressed in order to encourage grazing. The 138 cover crop users who graze their covers were asked how they provide water to their livestock—48.6% (67 growers) use portable water tanks, 38.4% (53) use existing ponds and streams, and 29% (40) supply animals with water through a surface water line.

Among the 13% “Other” responses were wells, permanent tanks, irrigation systems, and water in nearby barns.



- GRAZING COVER CROPS
PROVIDES NET PROFIT GAINS FOR
6 IN 10 PRODUCERS -

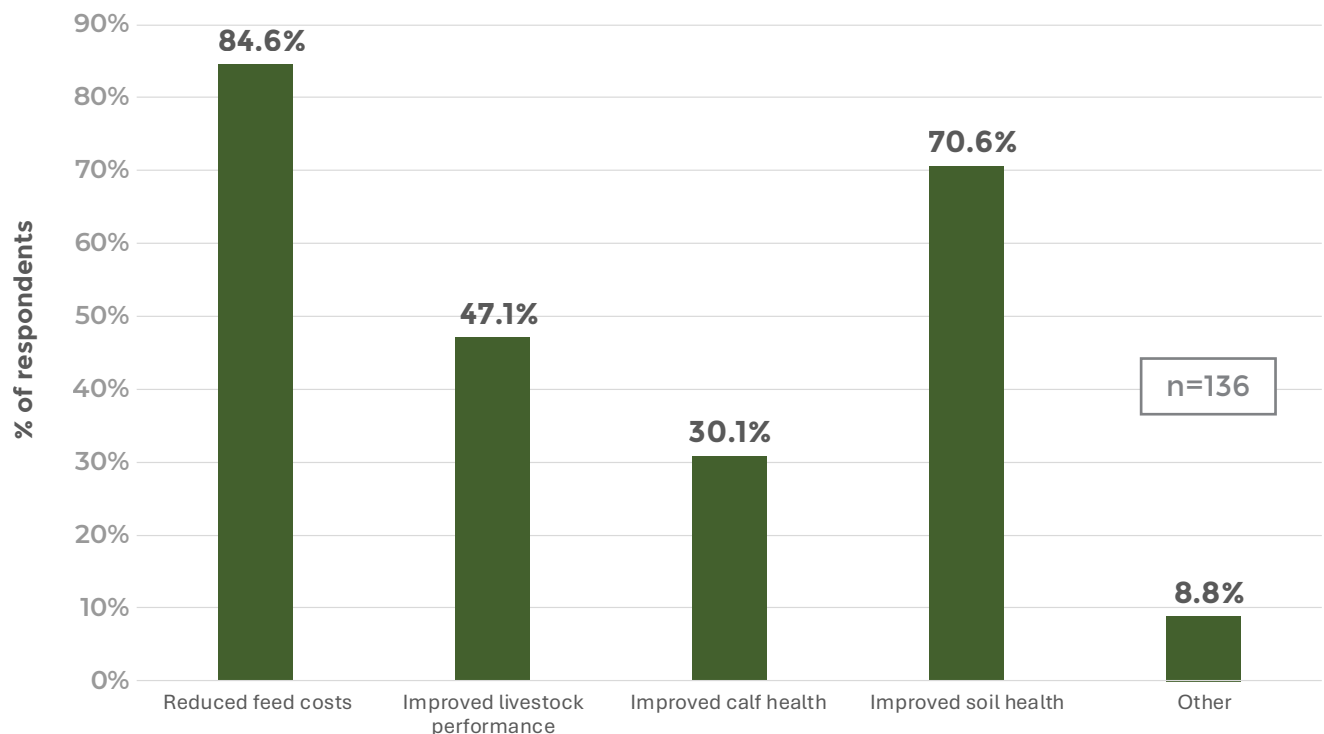
6 OUT OF 10 COVER CROP GRAZERS EXPERIENCE NET PROFIT GAINS

The survey sought to determine the net profits and costs of grazing cover crops. Among the 136 respondents, (115 cover crop users who graze livestock) 84.6 % identified reduced feed costs as the biggest benefit. Not far behind, at 70.6% (96), was improved soil health. Livestock performance was identified by 47.1% (64), and improved calf health noted by 30.9% (42) as supplemental benefits of grazing cover crops.

In the “Other” category, 8.8% (12) of the producers wrote in a wide range of benefits, ranging from increased biodiversity and less erosion to reduced purchased fertility costs, better distribution of manure, and the opportunity to give their pasture a rest. Resting the pasture has an additional plus, notes one respondent, who pointed out that moving pigs to the cover crop breaks the worm cycle.

Several mentioned that the animals assist with cover crop termination, and one valued “Utilizing every square inch for a longer period of time vs monoculture system.”

BENEFITS FROM GRAZING COVER CROPS

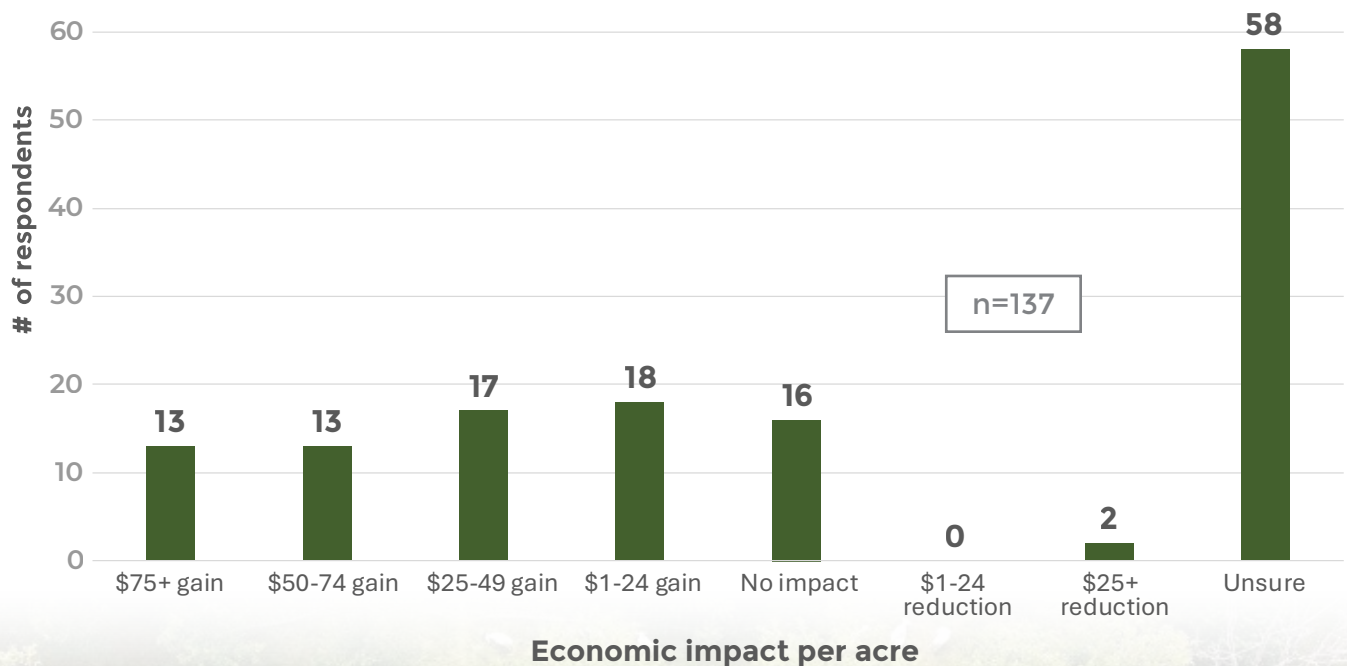


- GRAZING COVER CROPS PROVIDES NET PROFIT GAINS FOR 6 IN 10 PRODUCERS - (CONTINUED)

The economic impact of grazing cover crops vs. not grazing them was difficult for 58 of 137 grazing cover crop users (42.3%) to quantify. However, 18 (13.1%) said they saw a net profit gain of \$1 to \$24 per acre from the process, 17 (12.4%) experienced a net profit boost of \$25 to \$49 an acre, 13 (9.5%) clocked a net profit increase of \$50 to \$74 per acre, and the same number saw an improvement in net profit of more than \$75 per acre.

Sixteen (11.7%) saw no impact on net profit, while only two respondents (1.5%) reported a loss in net profits from grazing cover crops.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF GRAZING COVERS

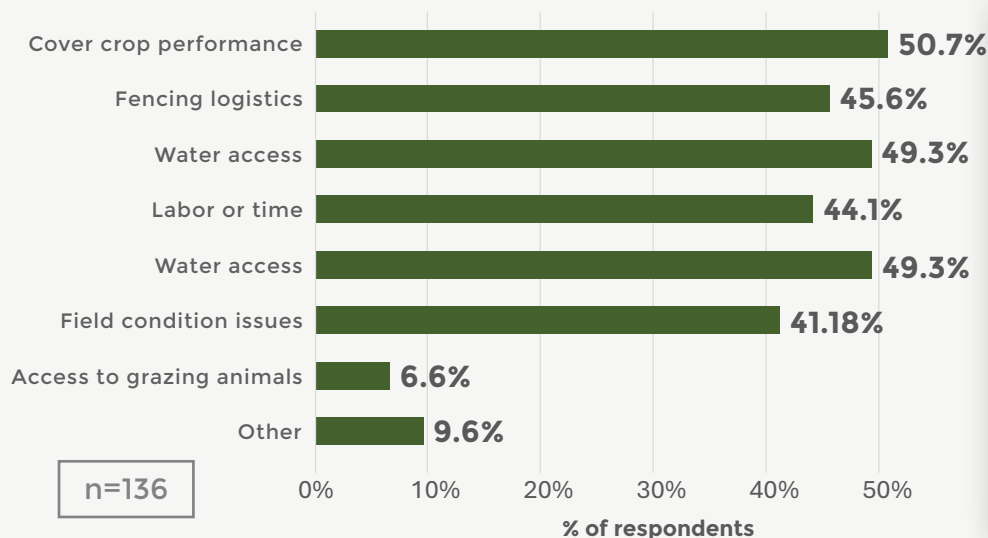


- LIVESTOCK INFRASTRUCTURE IS SIGNIFICANT BARRIER -

The survey asked cover crop graziers about challenges they faced when engaged in the practice. Respondents were allowed to select as many answers as they wished and the 136 responses were mostly consistent. Half (50.7%, or 69 growers) said cover crop establishment or stand establishment were challenges. Water access followed at 49.3% (67), along with fencing logistics with 45.6% (62), labor/time at 44.1% (60), and field condition issues such as compaction or roughness with 41.2% (56) mentions. Nine growers (6.6%) said they had difficulty finding animals to graze the cover crops.

Thirteen growers wrote answers under “Other,” including agronomic issues such as getting the right cover crop blends for grazers, stockpiling forage for winter, grazing quickly enough before planting the next cash crop, and reduced effectiveness of herbicide termination when grazing animals in the spring. Two specified equipment challenges, two mentioned drought, one pointed to a need to learn how to charge for grazing, and another pointed out a dearth of certified organic options. Finally, one wrote, “I have more cover crops than I have cows to eat it all.”

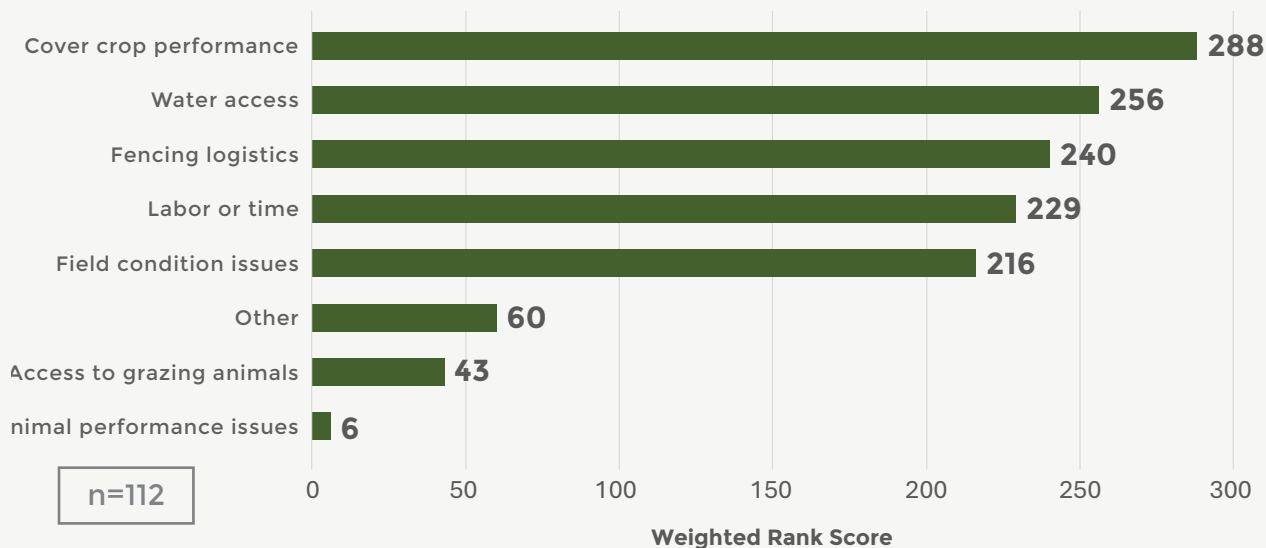
CHALLENGES OF GRAZING COVER CROPS



Respondents were then asked to arrange the challenges they selected in order of priority from most to least challenging. Scores were very relative, as respondents selected between one and six answers, and several who identified challenges in the previous question did not rank them. In all, 112 respondents participated in the ranking.

The weighted ranking of challenges put cover crop performance/stand establishment at the top with a score of 288, water access next at 256, fencing logistics third at 240, labor/time fourth at 229, and field condition issues like roughness or compaction fifth with a weighted score of 216. Difficulty finding animals to graze the cover crops scored 43, animal performance issues came in last at six, and “Other” scored 60.

RANKED CHALLENGES OF GRAZING COVER CROPS

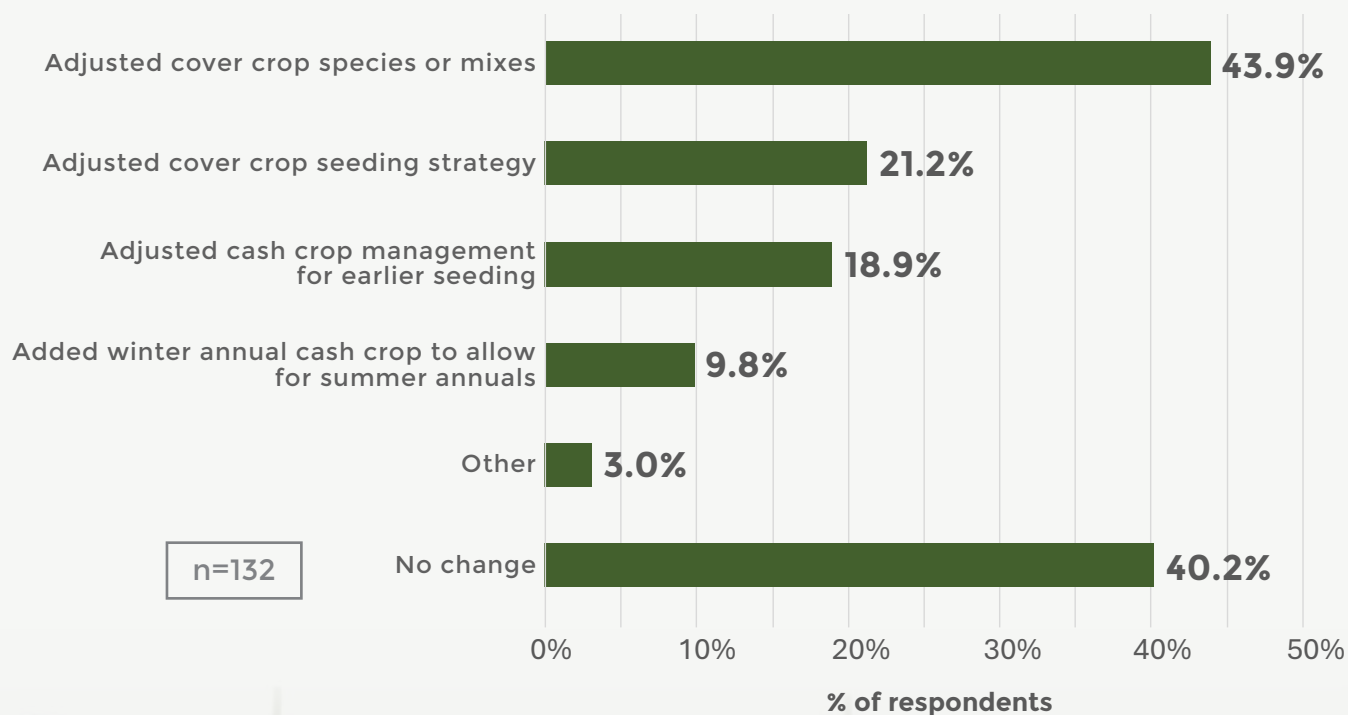


- LIVESTOCK INFRASTRUCTURE IS SIGNIFICANT BARRIER - (CONTINUED)

When asked whether cover crop grazing influenced changes in their cropping system, 40.2% of 132 respondents (53 grower/graziers) said “no,” while 43.9% (58) said they adjusted their cover crop species or mixes, 21.2% (28) adjusted their cover crop seeding strategy, 18.9% (25) adjusted their cash crop management to seed cover crops earlier, and 9.9% (13) added a winter annual cash crop to allow for summer annuals.

Three percent (four producers) wrote in answers in the “Other” box. One took ground out of cash crop production and dedicated it to growing just a cover crop, another will try interseeding in the fall of 2026, and another will dedicate 15 acres in the fall of 2026 to intense rotational grazing on a cover crop mix. One grower reported not understanding the question.

CROPPING SYSTEM CHANGES INFLUENCED BY COVER CROP GRAZING



COMMODITY GROWERS USING COVER CROPS

- COVER CROPS IN ROTATION -



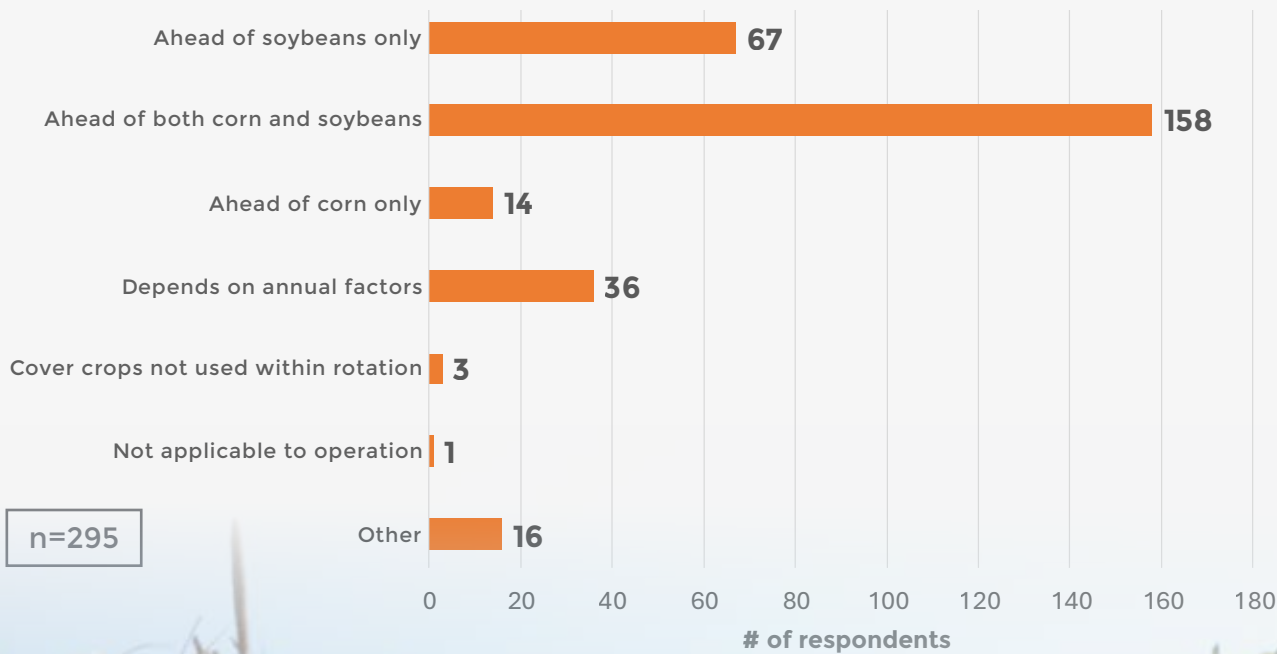
Among cover crop users participating in the survey, 68.8% reported growing corn and 64.6% reported growing soybeans. Of 295 respondents who produce corn and soybeans in rotation, 158 (53.6%) said they typically plant cover crops ahead of both corn and soybeans, 67 (22.7%) said they typically use cover crops ahead of soybeans only, and 14 (4.7%) reported planting covers only before corn. Another 36 (12.2%) said their cover crop use varies depending on weather conditions.

Three (1%) said they did not typically use cover crops in their corn/soybean rotation, and 1 (0.3%) noted that they do not use a corn/soybean rotation.

Digging deeper into how cover crops fit their cash crop rotation, 16 growers selected “Other” and offered a diverse set of crops and conditions—including sugar beets, wheat, rye, triticale, sorghum, and hay—under which they schedule cover crops. Another reported using cover crops in prevent plant acres.

Four of the 16 mentioned interseeding cover crops. Their answers mentioned interseeding in corn, soybeans, or other, unspecified cash crops.

COVER CROP IMPACTS ON WEED CONTROL EFFECTIVENESS



- COMMODITY PRODUCERS SEE SLIGHT YIELD ADVANTAGES AFTER COVER CROPS -

Cash crop yields after cover crops are the source of great interest and, often, changing values. Planting and termination dates, cover crop species and their compatibility with various cash crops, and management can have major impacts on subsequent cash crops, so experience and information strongly influence success.

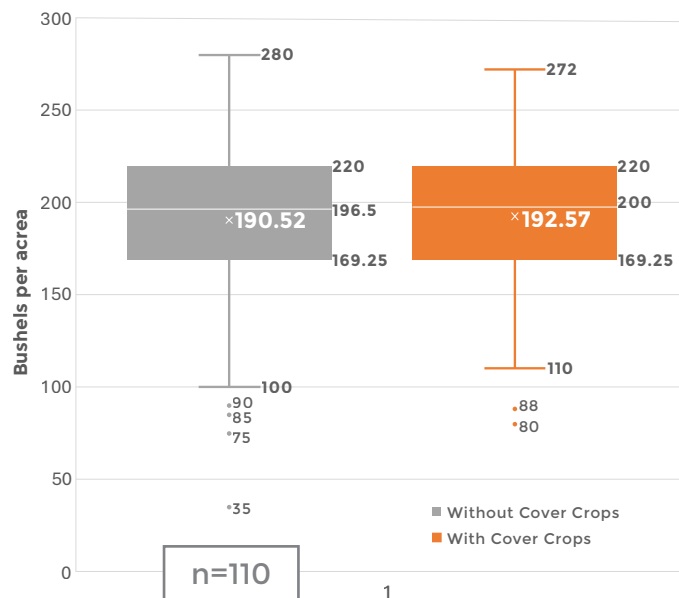
Throughout the SARE/CTIC/ASTA National Cover Crop Series, average yields of corn and soybeans improved at least slightly following cover crops, and in some cases—particularly in dry years—the improvements could be substantial.

CORN YIELDS

In this year's survey, corn growers were asked, "On land where you planted cover crops in 2024, how did your 2025 corn crop perform when compared to other, similar acreage where cover crops were not used?"

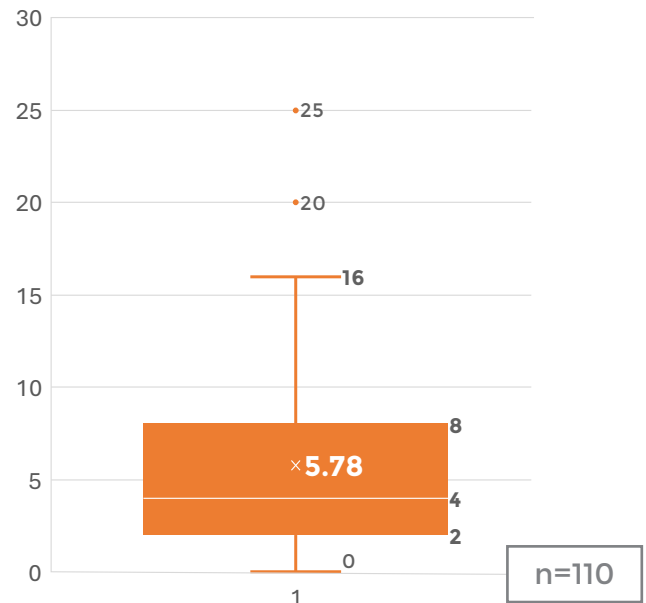
After removing extreme and unreasonable data points, 110 responses pointed to a slight increase in both median and mean corn yield following cover crops. The mean corn yield after cover crops was 200 bushels per acre, compared to 196.5 bushels per acre on similar ground without cover crops, an average benefit of 3.5 bushels (1.8%) after cover crops. The median corn yield following cover crops was 192.57 bushels, a two-bushel (1%) bump over the non-cover-cropped corn yield median of 190.52 bushels.

CORN PERFORMANCE WITH & WITHOUT COVER CROPS



Among the 110 respondents, those corn fields had been in cover crops a mean of 5.78 years and a median of four years, providing time for soils to begin showing improvements and growers gaining valuable experience in cover crop management.

YEARS OF COVER CROPS IN CORN

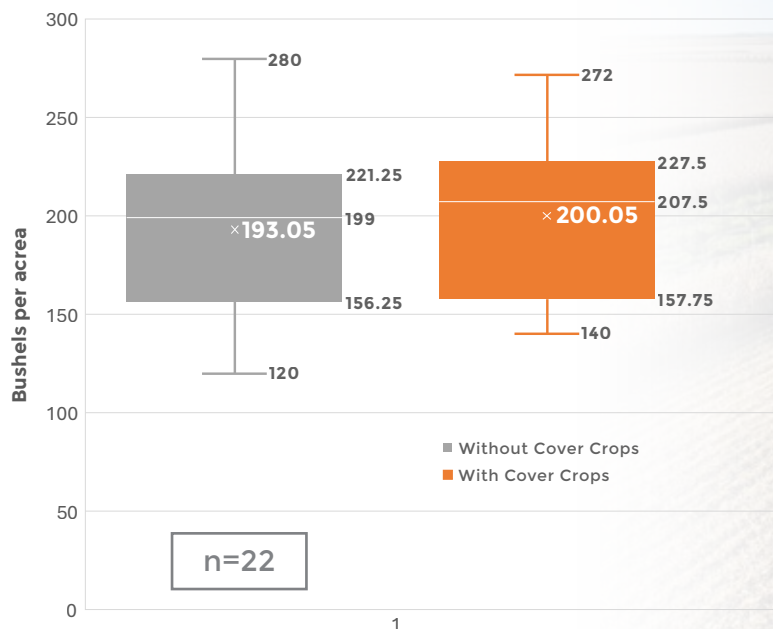


Isolating corn yields among just the growers with 10 years or more of cover crop experience widened the yield improvement to seven bushels per acre, indicating that more experience with cover crops could contribute to greater success.

- COMMODITY PRODUCERS SEE SLIGHT YIELD ADVANTAGES AFTER COVER CROPS - (CONTINUED)

CORN YIELDS (CONTINUED)

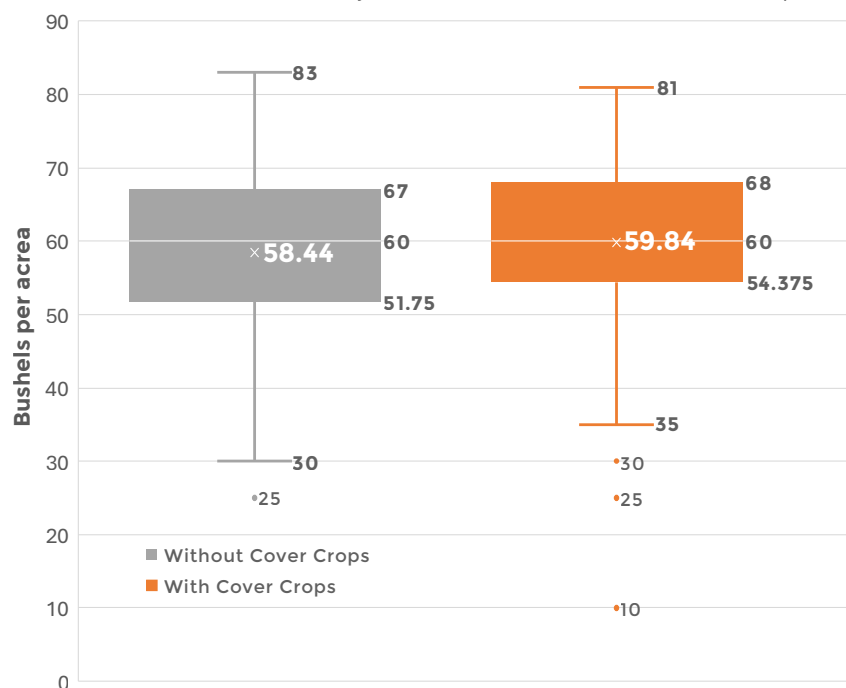
CORN PERFORMANCE WITH AND WITHOUT COVER CROPS, 10+ YEARS EXPERIENCE



SOYBEAN YIELDS

SOYBEAN PERFORMANCE WITH & WITHOUT COVER CROPS

Soybeans, with lower overall yield per acre, show a similar, but more subtle, advantage. Among 126 soybean-growing cover crop users, the median yields both with and without cover crops were nearly equal, though the mean yield after cover crops—at 59.84 bushels per acre—was slightly higher than the 58.44-bushel mean without cover crops. That represents a 1.4-bushel (2.4%) improvement following cover crops.



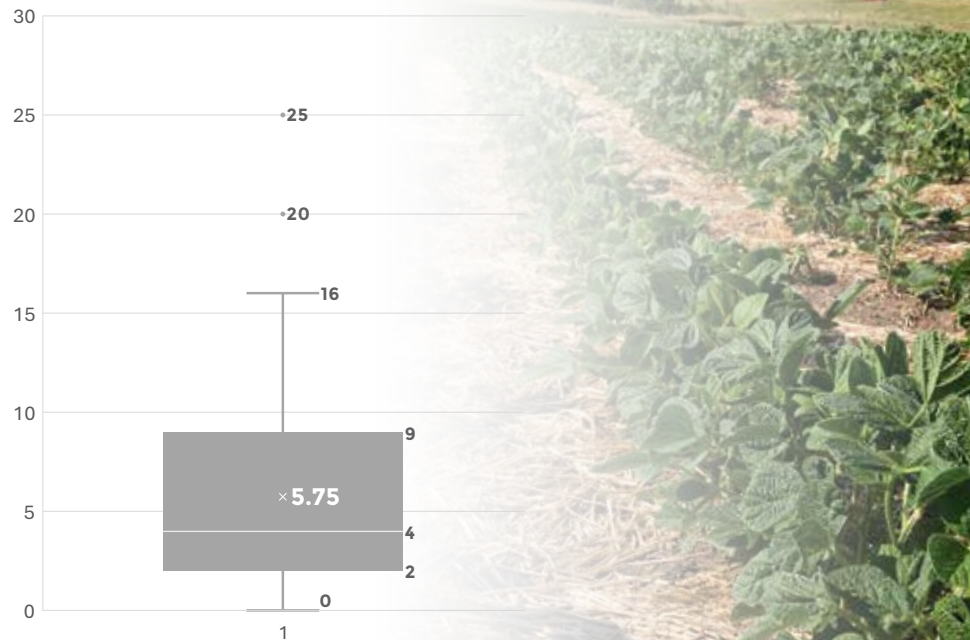
- COMMODITY PRODUCERS SEE SLIGHT YIELD ADVANTAGES AFTER COVER CROPS - (CONTINUED)

SOYBEAN YIELDS (CONTINUED)

YEARS OF COVER CROP USE IN SOYBEANS

The number of years of experience in cover crops in the soybean yield question was nearly identical to the data from the previous question on corn—respondents' cover crop fields had been in covers for a median of four years and a mean of 5.74 years. Isolating growers with 10 or more years of experience with cover crops also did not significantly change the result.

n=121

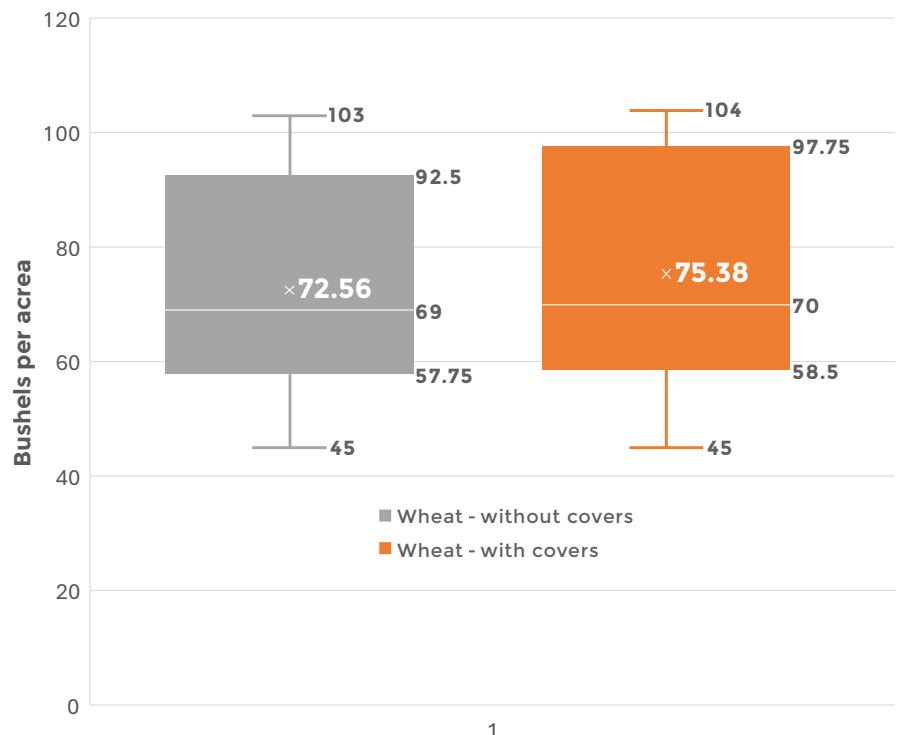


WHEAT YIELDS

WHEAT PERFORMANCE WITH & WITHOUT COVER CROPS

Wheat yields continued the trend, though with a much smaller sample size. Sixteen growers reported a median wheat yield of 70 bushels per acre following cover crops and a 69-bushel median without covers. The mean values showed a wider spread: 75.38 bushels per acre after cover crops, a 2.8-bushel (3.9%) advantage over the 72.56-bushel median without covers.

n=16



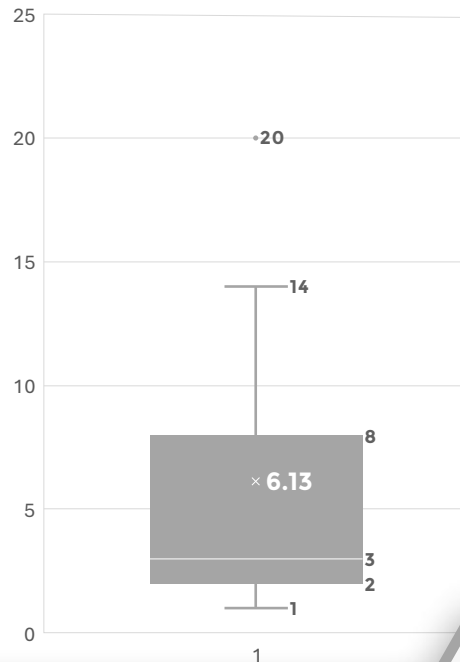
- COMMODITY PRODUCERS SEE
SLIGHT YIELD ADVANTAGES AFTER
COVER CROPS -
(CONTINUED)

WHEAT YIELDS (CONTINUED)

YEARS OF COVER CROP USE IN WHEAT

The small number of wheat growers responding to this question led to a significant divergence between mean and median number of years in cover crops. Each data point had a larger pull on the calculation, so growers with 14 and 20 years of cover crop experience raised the average. The median value for the wheat fields referenced in the yield data was three years in cover crops, while the median was 6.13 years.

n=16



- PROFITABILITY -

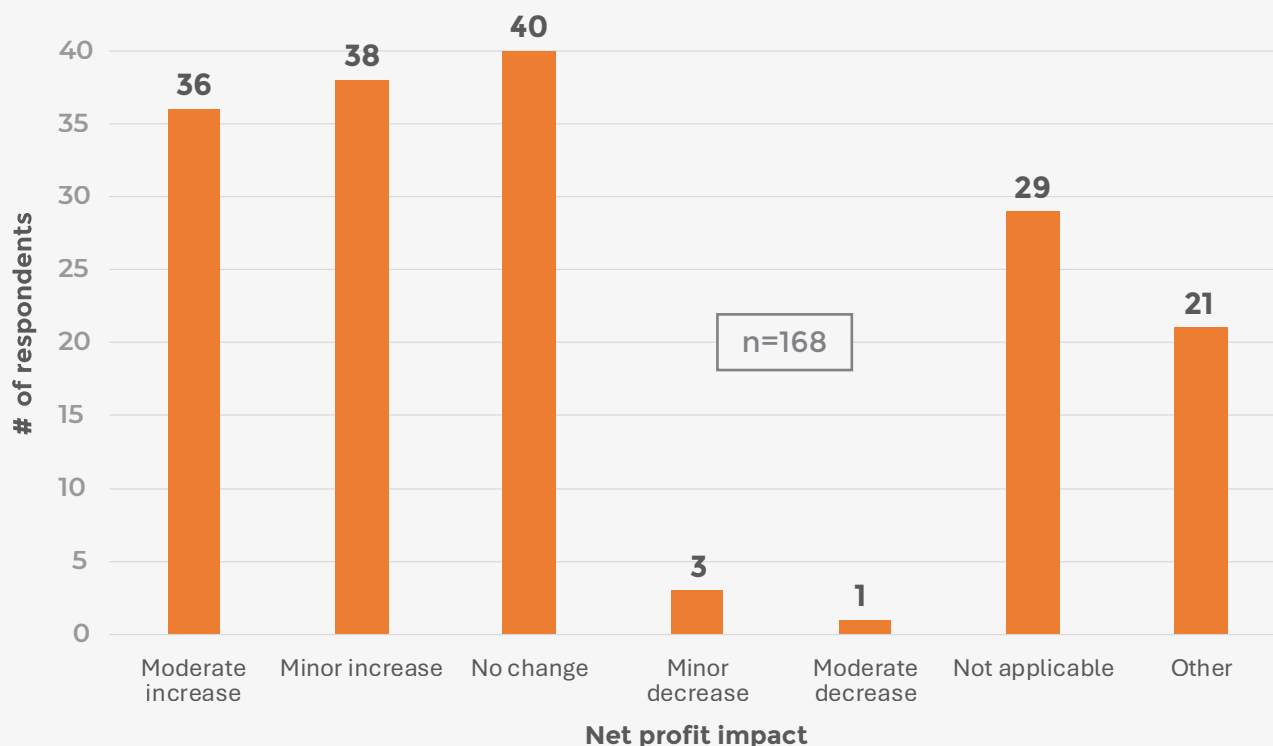
Economic impact is a major factor in the decision of whether to adopt cover crops (or any farming practice), so the survey explores the effects on profit among specialty crop producers, whose wide range of crops and conditions make yield data difficult to use.

Growers were asked to consider productivity and yield of their crops, overall labor and costs for controlling weeds and other pests, fertility costs, and the costs of cover crop seed and termination and determine whether cover crops contributed positively or negatively to their operations' income.



About two-thirds of the specialty crop growers reported that cover crops were profitable for them—36 of 168 (21.4%) said cover crops contributed an increase of 5% or more to their operations' income, and 38 (22.6%) reported a minor increase of 2-4%. Just three (1.8%) said cover crops resulted in a 2-to-4% decrease in net profit, and one (0.6%) attributed a decrease in profit of 5% or more from cover crops. Twenty-nine respondents (17.3%) said they did not raise specialty crops on a commercially significant basis.

COVER CROP IMPACT ON SPECIALTY CROP PROFITABILITY



Another 21 growers selected “Other” and wrote in answers. Most noted that it was too early for them to tell whether cover crops were contributing to profit, and a few admitted that they were not tracking data that would help them determine the economic impacts of the practice. Several pointed out that profit wasn’t their key goal. “The cover crops and good soil allow us to finish [sheep] on mixed grass pastures,” wrote one. “Healthier crops, helps support a living soil,” noted another.

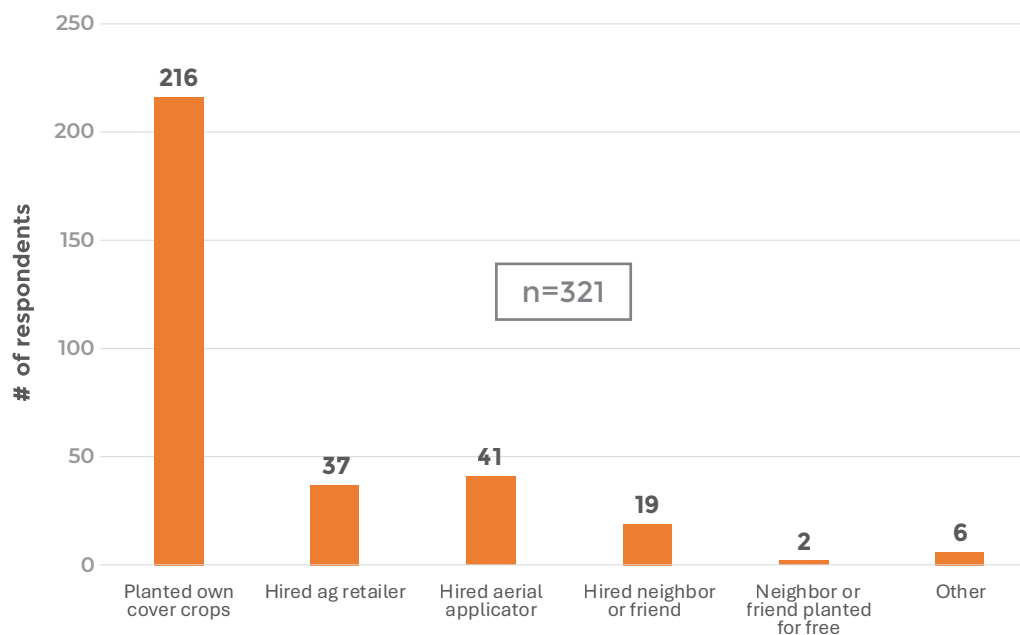
- TWO IN THREE PLANT THEIR OWN COVER CROPS -

Commodity crop growers who use cover crops were asked about how they seeded and terminated their cover crops. Of 321 respondents to the question, 216 (67.3%) reported planting their own cover crops. The next-most-popular option was paying an aerial applicator to seed covers, selected by 41 (12.8%), closely followed by 37 (11.5%) paying an ag retailer such as a fertilizer dealer or co-op to do the seeding. Nineteen (5.9%) paid a neighbor or friend for seeding services, two (0.6%) had neighbors or friends generous enough to plant the cover crops for free.

- TWO IN THREE PLANT THEIR OWN COVER CROPS - (CONTINUED)

PRIMARY PLANTING ARRANGEMENT

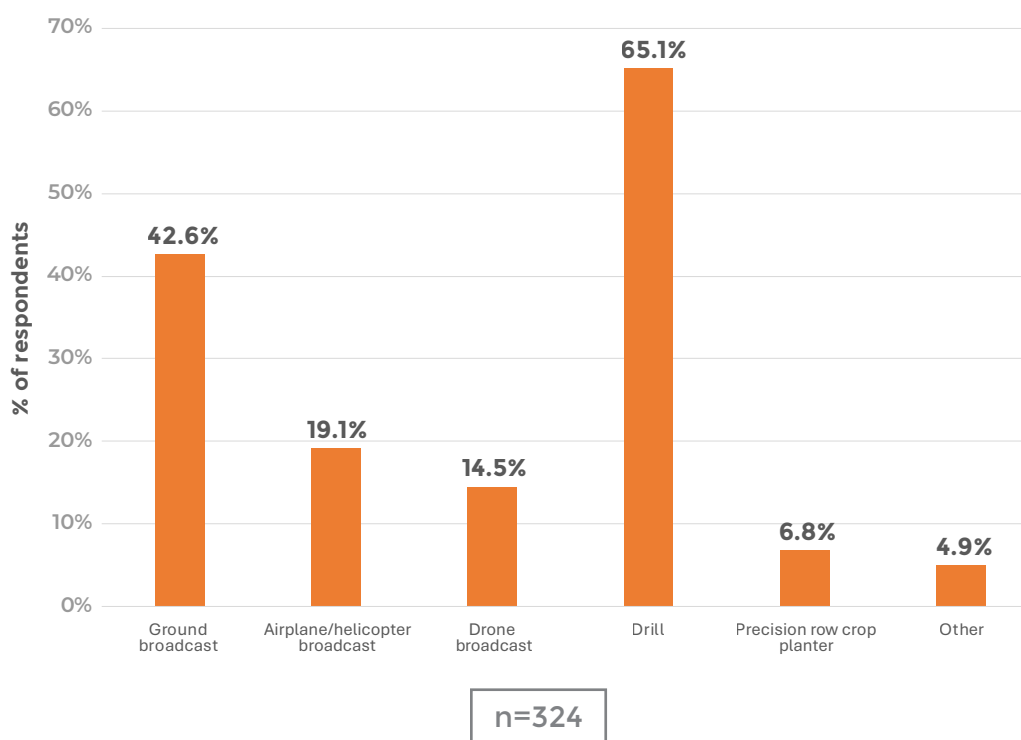
Six growers (1.9%) selected “Other,” of which four noted combinations of seeding arrangements, including drilling some of their own acres and also hiring a plane or drone. One hired an operator for their own equipment, and one spread cover crop seed with fertilizer over crop residue and incorporated the combination with a vertical tillage rig.



SEEDING METHODS

Drilling cover crops was the most popular seeding method by far, with 65.1% of 324 respondents selecting it among as many multiple-choice options as applied to their operations. Ground broadcast was the choice of 42.6%. Significantly fewer broadcast by airplane or helicopter (19.1%), and drones showed up in the survey for the first time, with 14.5% reporting that they seeded with autonomous aircraft. A precision row crop planter was identified by 6.8%.

Almost 5% chose “Other” and wrote in more detailed answers. Four mentioned air seeders and two no-till drills. Several described incorporation after broadcast, including four with vertical tillage implements. Three mounted seeders on the front of their combine, one used an interseeder, another broadcast between strips on a strip-till bar, and one wrote about a rolling harrow cover crop seeder.

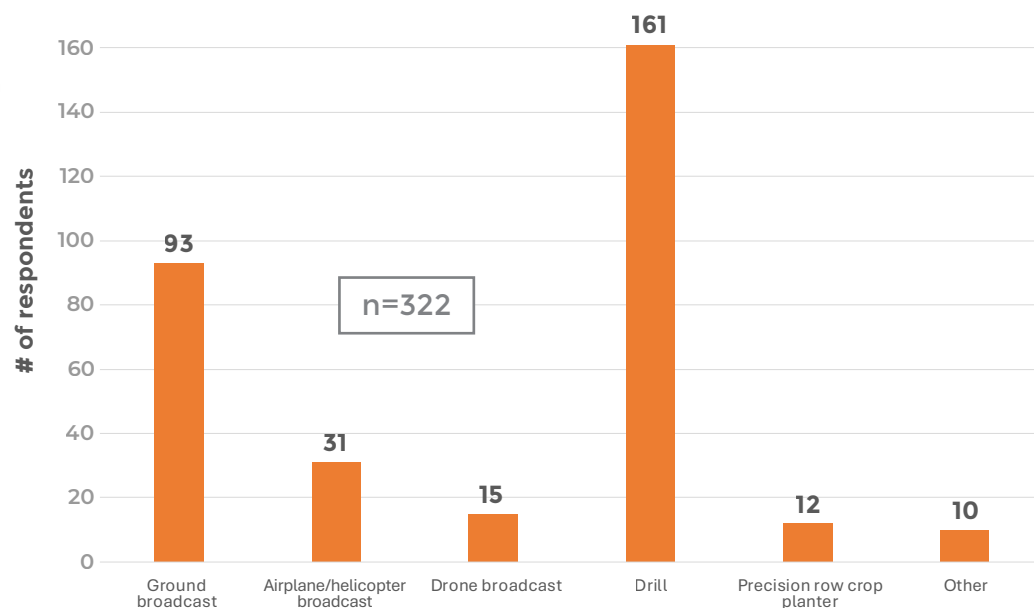


- TWO IN THREE PLANT THEIR OWN COVER CROPS - (CONTINUED)

The follow-up question asked which of the methods in the prior list of seeding tools was the one they most commonly used. Once again, the drill was the most common among the 322 respondents, with 161 (50%) selecting the tool, followed by 93 (28.9%) selecting ground broadcast. From the air, 31 (9.6%) selected broadcast by airplane or helicopter and 15 (4.7%) primarily used drones. Twelve (3.7%) mainly used precision row crop planters. Twelve (3.7%) mainly used precision row crop planters.

Among the 10 “Other” entries were three mentions of air seeders, two entries of “no-till” or “no-till drill,” one mention of an unspecified seeder followed by vertical tillage, one combine-mounted seeder, one rolling harrow, an interseeder, and “broadcast and light incorporation.”

MOST USED SEEDING METHOD



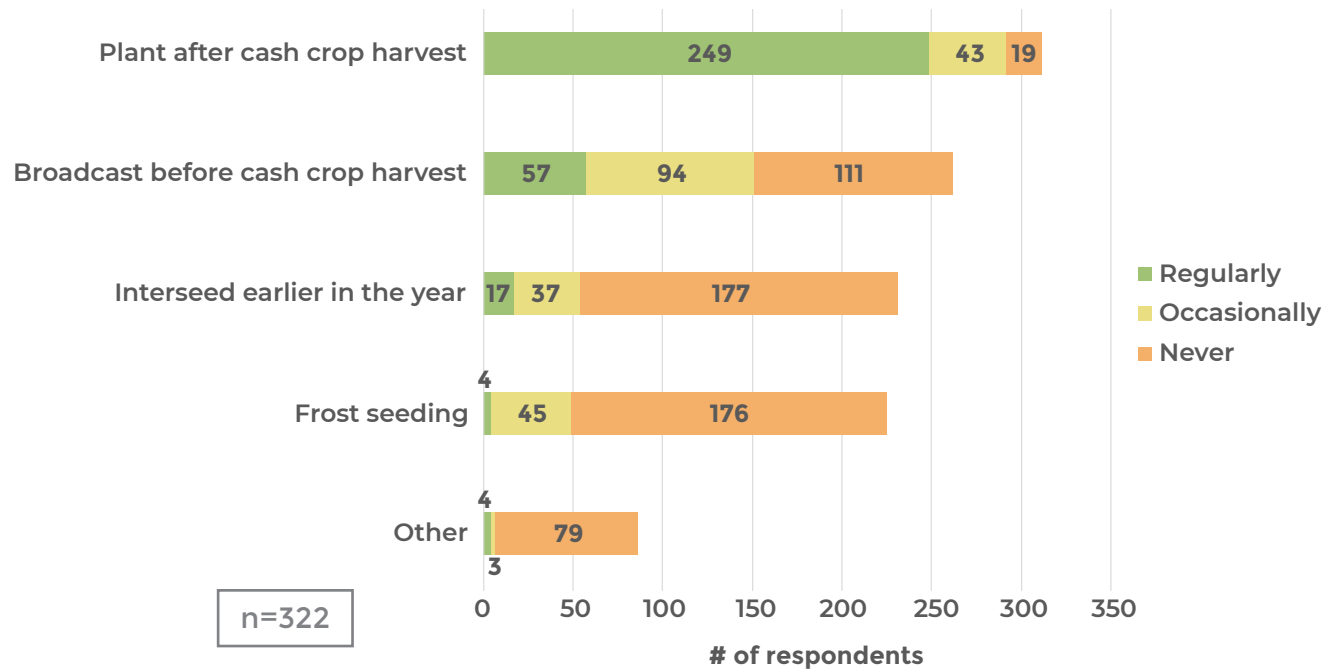
Planting covers after harvesting cash crops was, by far, the most common practice, with 249 of 322 cover crop users growing any crop rating that option “Regularly” and 43 saying they time their seeding after cash crop harvest “Occasionally.” Just 19 said they “Never” use that timing.

Broadcasting cover crop seed before cash crop harvest is done regularly by 57 of the cover crop users who grow commodity cash crops, occasionally by 94 and never by 111. Interseeding earlier in the year is a regular practice for 17, occasional for 37, and never for 177. Frost seeding was the least-used practice in the list, with just four respondents using the practice regularly and 45 doing it occasionally, while 176 reported never frost seeding.

Seven growers selected “Other” and pointed out other options, such as the one who regularly plants cover crops in the spring on fallow acres, another who regularly uses covers on prevent-plant acres, and another who plants either cover crops or double-cropped soybeans after wheat. A producer mentioned regularly broadcasting cover crop seed at harvest with the combine, and a final contributor pointed out that relay cropping used seed that was already left in the field, eliminating additional cover crop seed cost.

- TWO IN THREE PLANT THEIR OWN COVER CROPS - (CONTINUED)

TIMING OF COVER CROP PLANTING



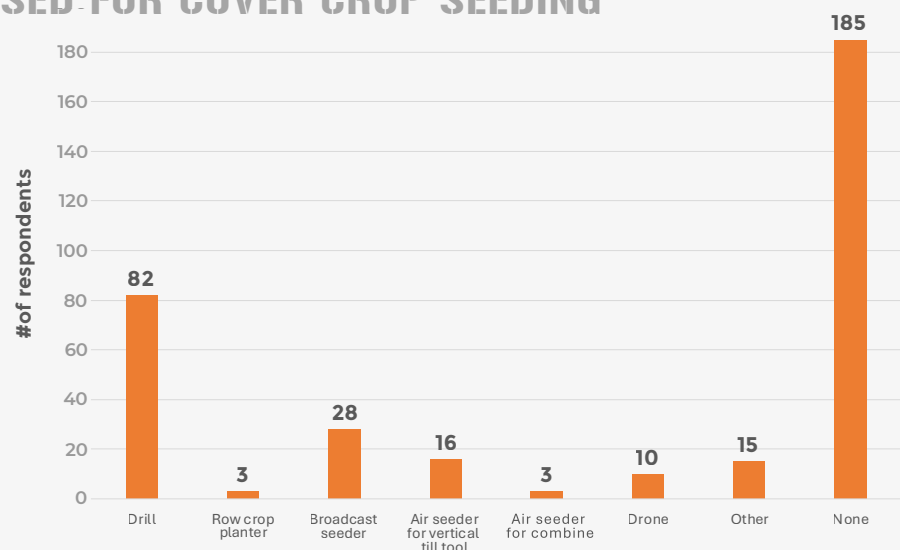
- DRILLS TOP COVER CROP EQUIPMENT INVESTMENTS -

Given the popularity of drilling cover crops, it's little surprise that the top equipment investment among cover crop users who grew commodity crops was a drill. Among 315 respondents, 82 (26%) reported purchasing a drill for cover crop seeding. Twenty-eight (8.9%) said they bought a broadcast seeder. Air seeders were the next-most-popular purchase, with 16 (5.1%) reporting that they bought an air seeder for a vertical tillage tool and three (1%) purchasing an air seeder for their combine. Ten growers (3.2%) purchased drones, and 15 selected "Other" but did not have a box in which to specify the equipment.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASED FOR COVER CROP SEEDING

Notably, nearly six in 10 of the growers—185, or 58.7%—did not purchase equipment for seeding cover crops.

n=315



- DRILLS TOP COVER CROP EQUIPMENT INVESTMENTS - (CONTINUED)

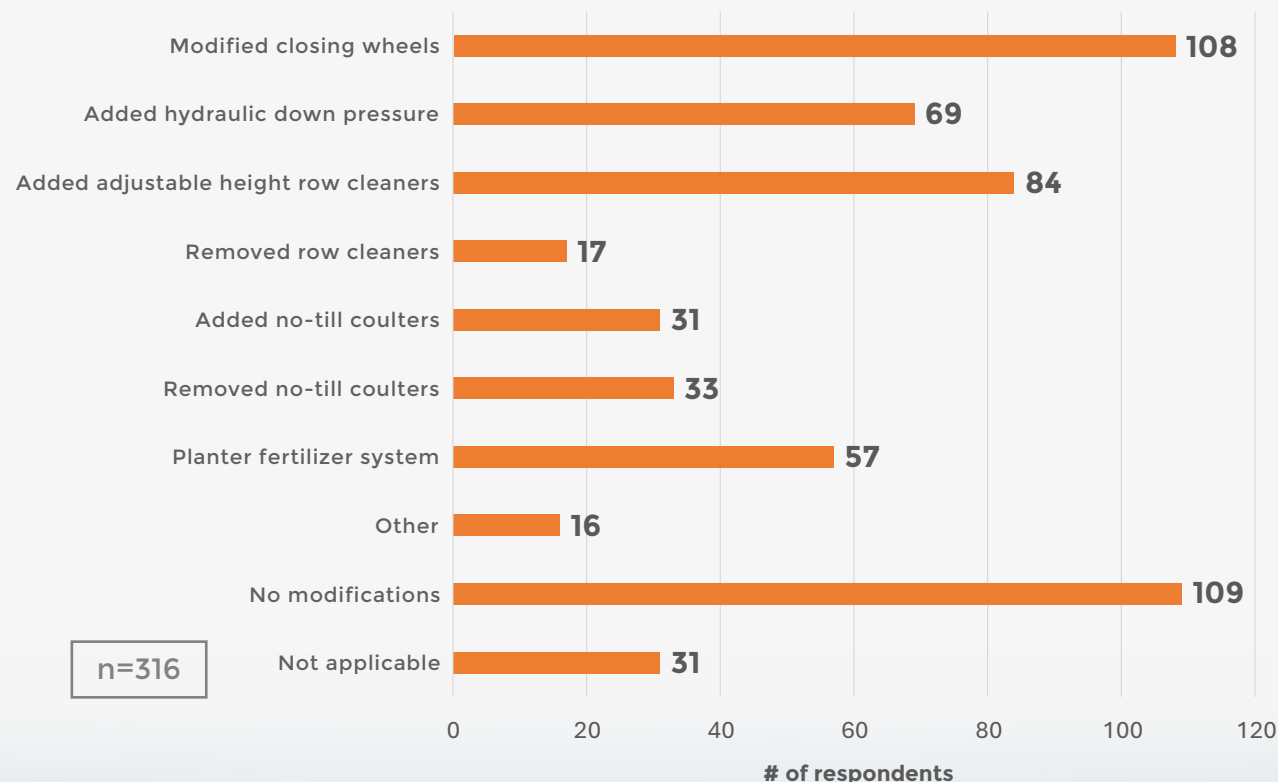
Even without purchasing cover crop seeding machinery, quite a few cover crop users invested in modifying their row crop planters to help them manage cover crops.

Commodity producers who used cover crops were then asked to select all the row crop planter modifications they have made to more effectively plant cash crops through cover crop residue. About one in three—108 of 316 respondents, or 34.2%—modified the closing wheels on their row crop planters. Eighty-four (26.6%) added adjustable-height row cleaners, 69 (21.8%) added hydraulic down pressure, and 57 (18%) added fertilizer applicators such as in-furrow or two-by-two placement units.

Thirty-three (10.4%) removed no-till coulters, while a nearly equal number (31, or 9.8%) added no-till coulters to their planters. Seventeen (5.4%) said they removed row cleaners, and 16 (5%) selected “Other” but did not have a box in which to specify the modifications they made.

It is interesting to note that 109 growers (34.5%) noted that they made no modifications to their row crop planters, and 31 (9.8%) said the question did not apply to them.

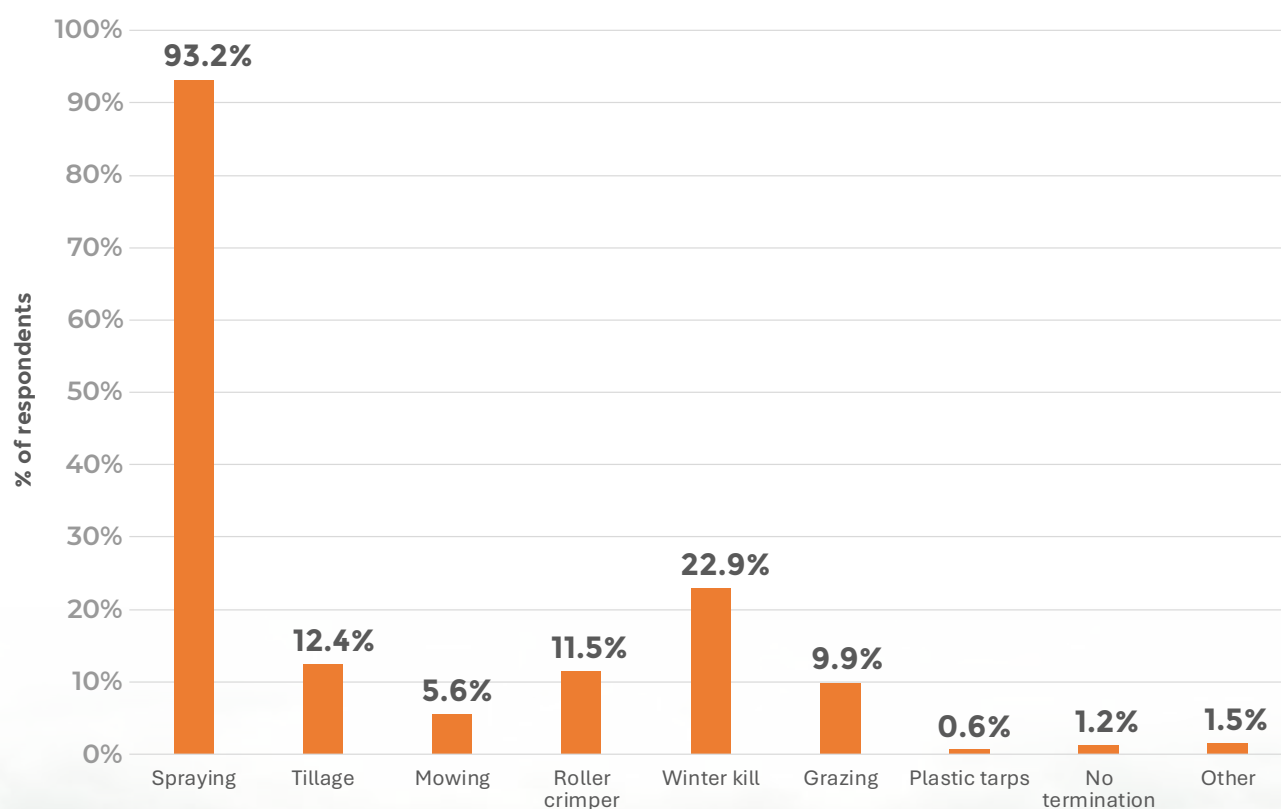
ROW CROP PLANTER MODIFICATIONS FOR COVER CROP RESIDUE



- TERMINATING COVER CROPS -

The survey asked participants to select up to three methods of terminating cover crops. Among the 323 growers surveyed, 301 growers, or 93.2 percent, identified spraying as the primary method for cover crop termination. The next-most-popular choice, winter kill, was noted by 22.9% (74), followed by tillage, which was selected by 12.4% (40). Roller crimpers were employed by 11.5% (37), grazing by 9.9% (32), and mowing by 5.6% (18). “No termination or perennial cover” was in the top three options for 1.24% (4) and using plastic tarps to block light was employed by 0.62% (2).

Five growers typed in termination methods under “Other,” including string weeder, natural senescence, and roller. The final write-ins were “hay” and, “baled.”

COVER CROP TERMINATION METHODS

n=323

COVER CROP INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Shaping attractive and effective cover crop incentive programs could significantly increase cover crop adoption among producers who need help over economic hurdles. In this section of the survey, the team explored how widely used cover crop incentive programs were among cover crop users, then sought insight on program features that could improve adoption. It is interesting to compare cover crop users' answers to those of former users and non-users, which were gathered with the same questions in the 2026 survey.



- CC INCENTIVE PROGRAMS -

Of 439 cover crop users who answered this question, 43.7% (192) did not receive any cover crop incentive payments in 2025. Approximately one in four (22.8%, or 100) reported a state-funded payment through a local soil and water conservation district, 18.9% (83) participated in the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and 13.9% (61) received a check through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Payments from other publicly funded programs were noted by 12.3% (54) cover crop users.

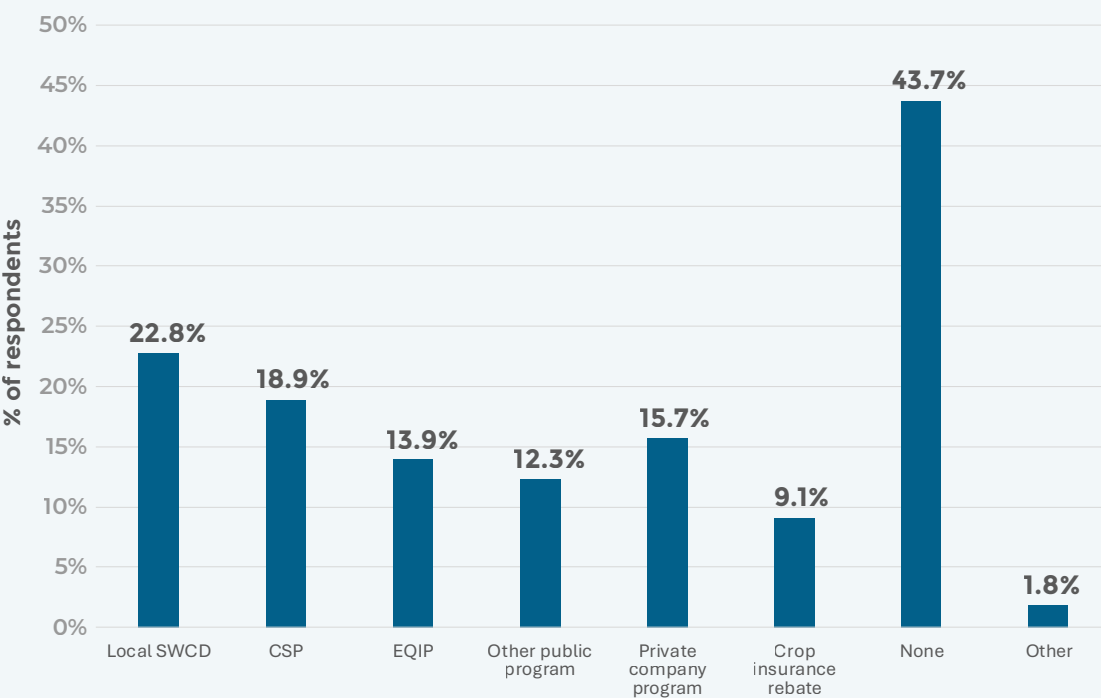
Privately funded incentives to plant cover crops or use regenerative practices incentivized 15.7% of the respondents to this question (69) and 9.1% (40) received a crop insurance rebate that provided funding for cover crops.

Free responses in the “Other” incentives write in box included, NRCS’s Healthy Soil Reimbursement program, a university cover crop variety comparison trial, H2Ohio, a national pheasant habitat program, watershed funds, and free seed from the county Soil and Water Conservation District. One grower mentioned a “government water penalty” but did not further identify the penalty in question.

COVER CROP PAYMENTS RECEIVED IN 2025

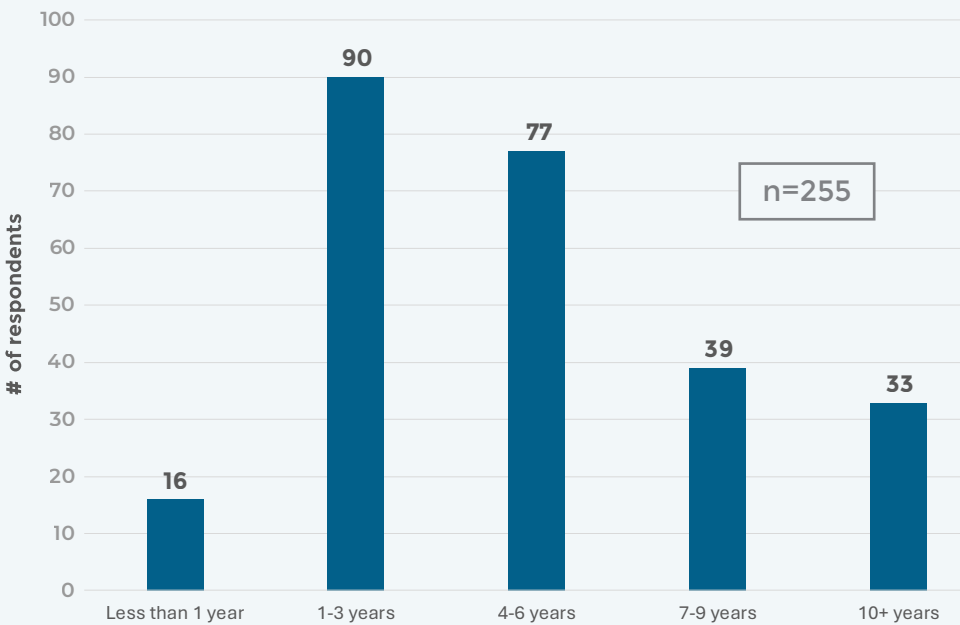
One grower’s comment underscored the importance of incentive program design, writing that some of their ground had been in cover crops too long to qualify for payments, so they were considering not using covers on those fields.

n=439



COVER CROP INCENTIVE PAYMENT HISTORY

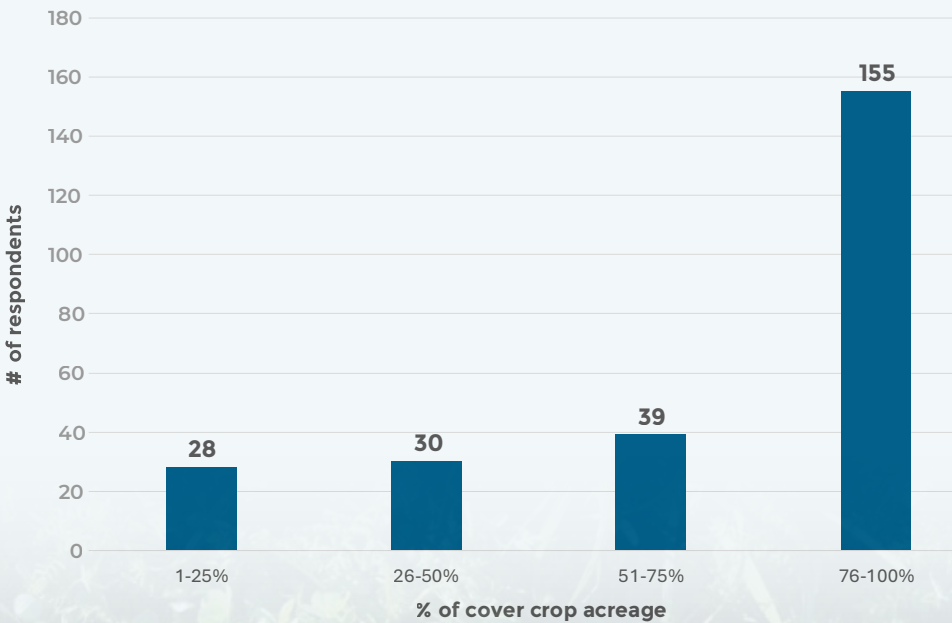
When the duration of payments was surveyed, cover crop users who reported receiving cover crop incentives in 2025 were asked how many years they had been receiving payments. Of 255 respondents, 16 (6.3%) had received payments for less than one year, 90 (35.3%, the largest percentage) for one to three years, 77 (30.2%) for 4 to 6 years, 39 (15.3%) for seven to nine years, and 33 (12.9%) had been receiving cover crop incentives for 10 years or more.



PORTION OF COVER CROP ACRES RECEIVING INCENTIVE PAYMENT

Six in 10 incentive recipients (155 of 252, or 61.5%) received payments for 76 to 100% of their 2025-2026 cover crop acres, while 39 (15.5%) were incentivized for 51 to 75% of their cover cropped area, 30 (11.9%) for 26 to 50%, and 28 (11.1%) for one to 25% of their cover cropped acres.

n=252

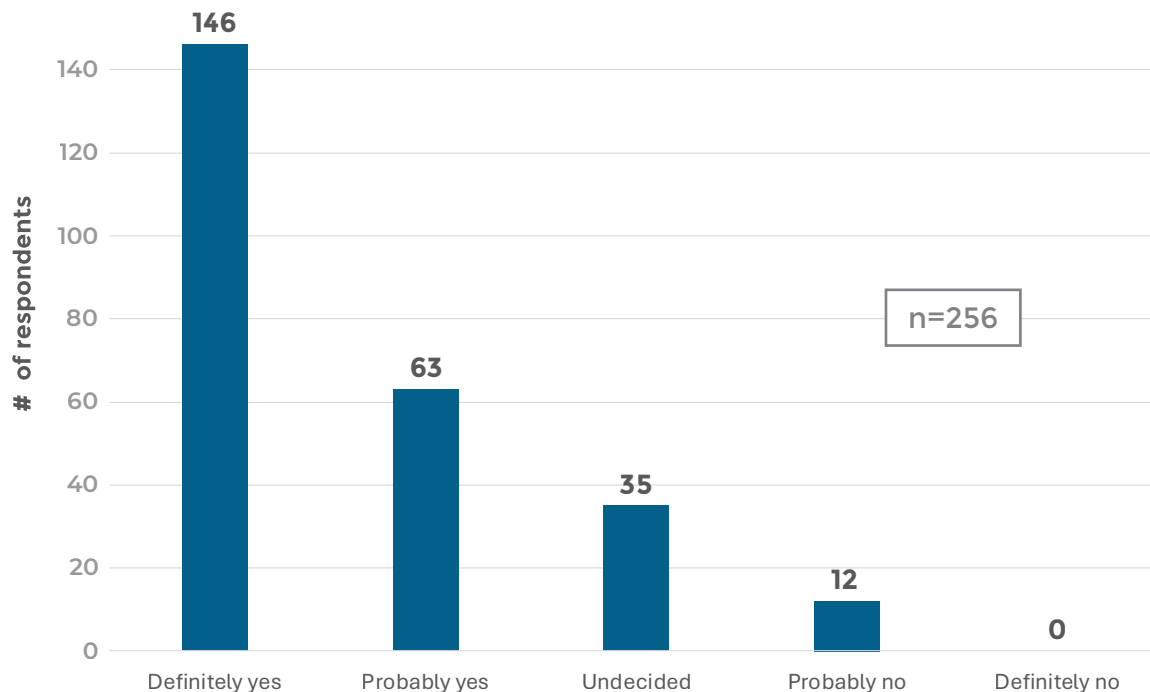


- INCENTIVES HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACT -

It is interesting to compare the proportion of cover crop users who received incentive payments for the practice in 2025—a total of 56.3%—with the 21.6% of former users who had received incentive payments at some time. There is a strong correlation between participation in incentive programs and use of cover crops, which appears to indicate that incentives are making cover crops more attractive.

Importantly, incentive programs appear to accomplish the objective of inspiring growers to try cover crops and then continuing the practice independently as they observe the benefits of the practice. Of 256 cover crop users who reported receiving an incentive payment for cover crops in 2025, 146 (57%) said they definitely plan to continue using cover crops after incentive payments end, and 63 (24.6%) say they probably will continue with cover crops. Thirty-five (13.7%) were undecided, and 12 (4.7%) they probably would not continue the practice when payments were done.

INTENT TO CONTINUE COVER CROP USE AFTER PAYMENTS END

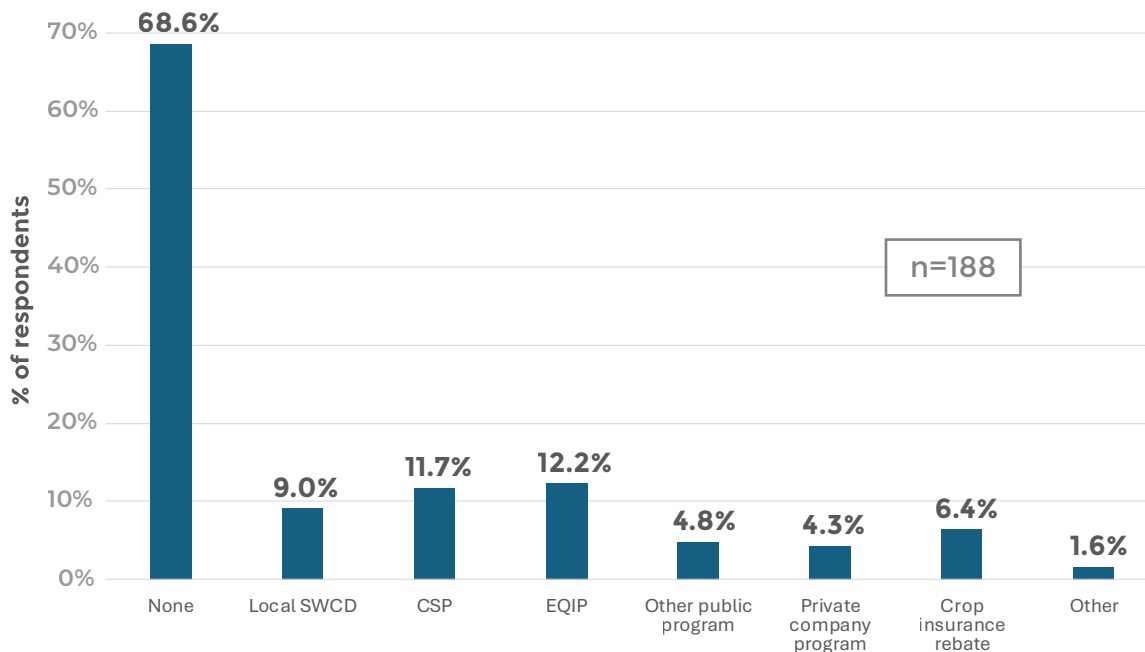


Among 188 cover crop users who reported not receiving an incentive payment for the cover crop they planted in 2025, 7 of 10 (68.6%, or 129 growers) reported that they had never received payments for cover crops. Among those in this group who had received incentive payments in the past, EQIP was the most commonly used program, with 12.2% (23) saying they had participated in the program in prior years, followed by 11.7% (22) that had been enrolled in CSP at some time, 9% (17) in a state-funded Soil and Water Conservation District program, 6.4% (12) who received a crop insurance rebate at some point, 4.8% (9) who had been in another publicly funded program, and 4.3% (eight) who had received payment from a private company to use cover crops or regenerative practices. (Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.)

Selecting “Other,” one grower mentioned USDA but noted that they forgot which program funded a past incentive on their farm, and 2 mentioned receiving free cover crop seed—one from their local Conservation District and the other from a non-profit.

- INCENTIVES HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACT - (CONTINUED)

PAST COVER CROP PAYMENTS RECEIVED



The user experience in cover crop incentive programs can have a significant impact on the success of the program. When asked about the ease of enrolling in a cover crop incentive program that paid them incentives in 2025 or before, 89 of 307 users (27.7%) said the process was very easy and 107 (34.9%) said it was somewhat easy. Fifty growers (16.3%) chose “Neutral” to describe the process, while 43 (14%) said it was somewhat difficult. Six (1.9%) said enrolling was very difficult.

Twelve participants (3.9%) said the difficulty varied by program. Although one wrote, “Easy when it was offered,” most pointed to complicated programs, many pointing to CSP as their example. Another entry complained about difficulties working with NRCS.

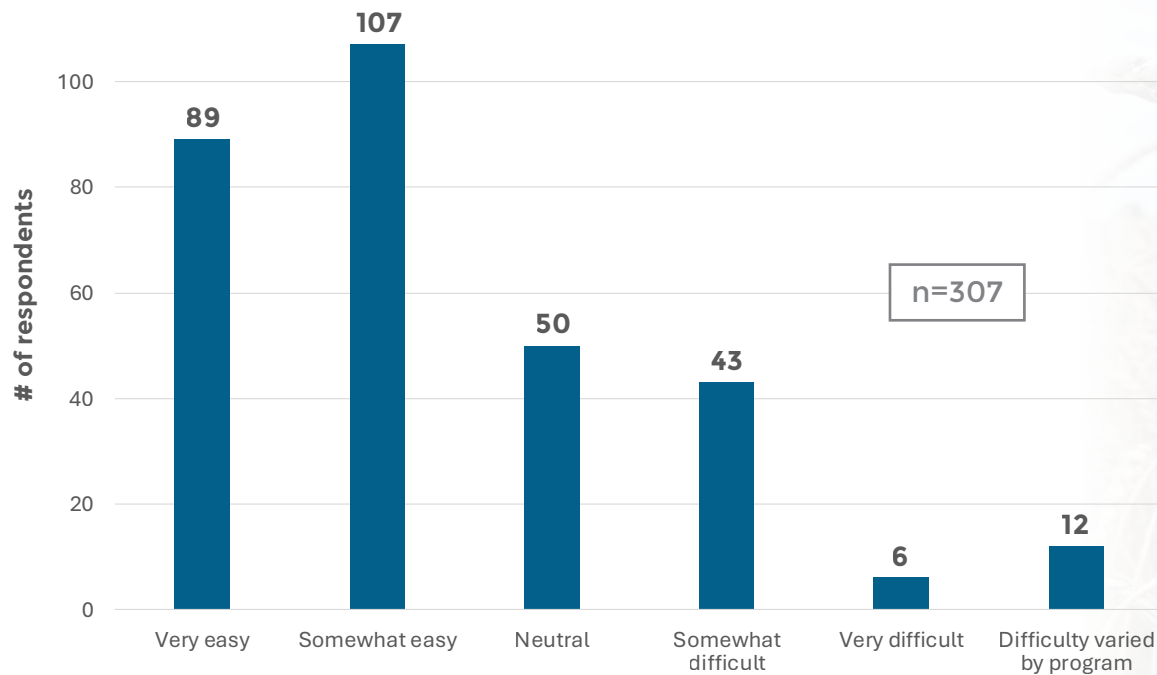
“Federal programs are very difficult,” wrote a grower, adding, “State programs are easier.”

“Some are easier than others. Depends on administrative people,” noted a participant. “CSP can be a maze to travel through. Local watershed and private sources like PFI [Practical Farmers of Iowa] are easy,” echoed another. A respondent pointed out that collecting carbon usage data for an ethanol-related program was very tedious.

“It’s ridiculous honestly,” noted a disgruntled grower who pointed to program requirements for pure live seed. “Too much red tape and trying to make cookie cutter programs.”

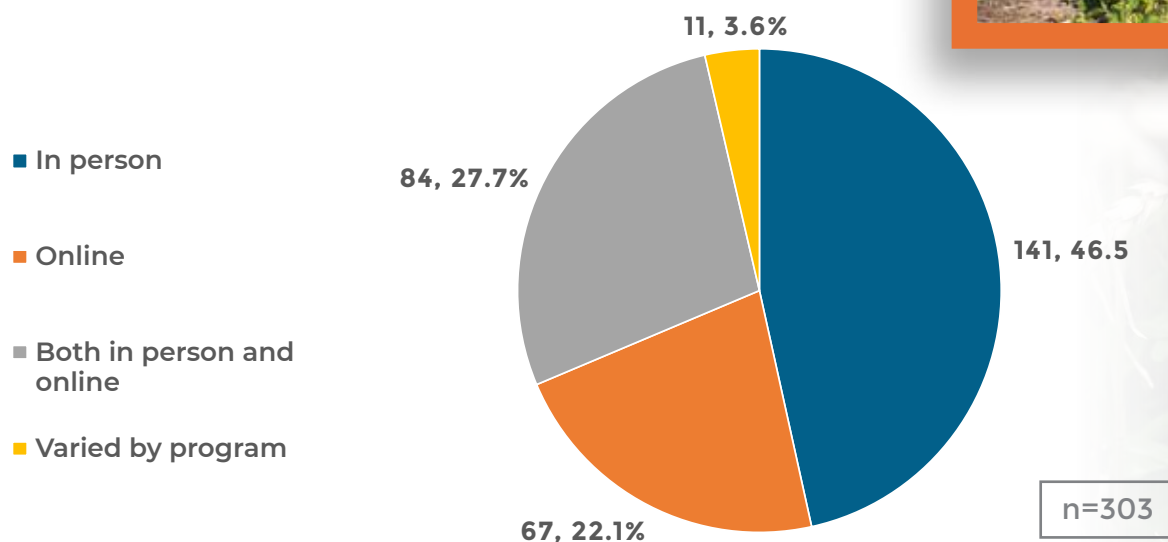
- INCENTIVES HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACT - (CONTINUED)

EASE OF PROGRAM ENROLLMENT



The process of enrollment was highlighted in another question for current and local incentive recipients. Of 303 respondents, 141 (46.5%) enrolled in their incentive program in-person at a local office. Sixty-seven (22.1%) enrolled via an online application, and 84 (27.7%) used a combination of online and in-person processes. Eleven (3.6%) said the process varied by program, with three mentioning enrolling by phone and two saying program representatives came to their farms to enroll the producer.

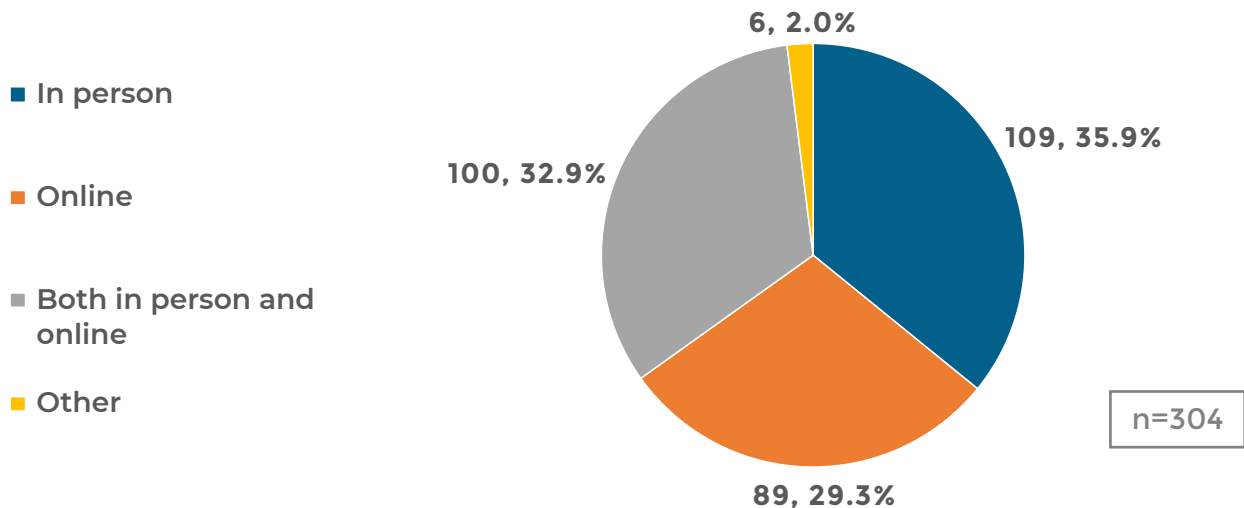
PROGRAM ENROLLMENT PROCESS



- INCENTIVES HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACT - (CONTINUED)

The mix of procedures largely matches grower preference. Roughly one-third of the producers 109 of 304, or 35.9%, said they preferred enrolling in-person at the office, 89 (29.3%) cited a preference for online enrollment, and 100 (32.9%) said they liked a combination of online and in-person enrollment. Six (2%) wrote in notes for “Other,” including on-farm enrollment with a visiting representative and another who specified they had no preference. Two write-ins mentioned telephones, with one grower suggesting enrollment be, “Online if they make it friendly program to understand and someone to talk to if there are questions to be asked.”

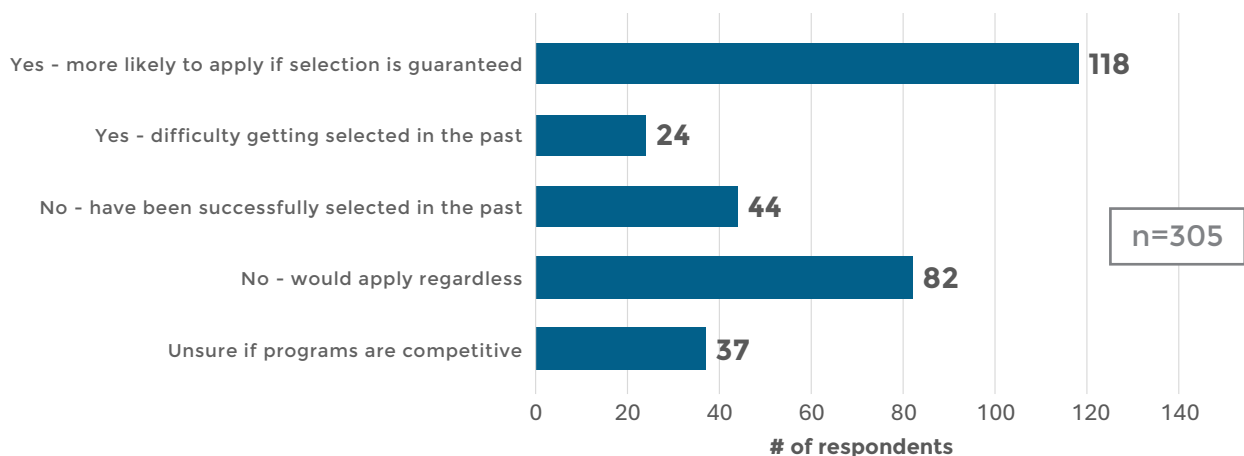
INITIAL YEAR OF PRIVATE SECTOR PROGRAM ENROLLMENT



Competition might not matter in incentive programs; 305 program users answered the question, “Do competitive application processes for cover crop incentive programs affect whether you apply?” Of them, 118 (38.7%) said they would be more likely to apply if their selection was guaranteed, and the second-largest group, at 82 (26.9%), said they would apply regardless of whether the program was competitive or guaranteed.

Forty-four (12.4%) chose the option that stated that they had been successfully selected in the past, so whether a program was competitive or guaranteed would not affect their willingness to apply. Twenty-four (7.9%) chose the opposite answer, stating that having had difficulty getting selected in the past would impact whether they would apply. Finally, 37 (12.1%) said they were unsure if the programs they had applied for were competitive.

DO COMPETITIVE APPLICATION PROCESSES AFFECT WILLINGNESS TO APPLY?

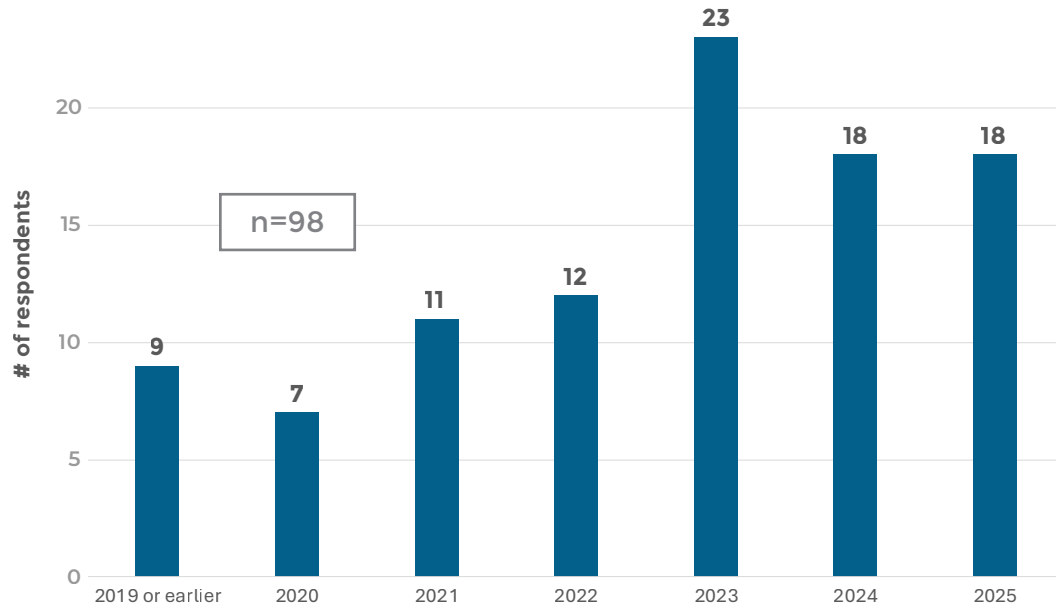


- INCENTIVES HAVE LONG-TERM IMPACT - (CONTINUED)

Private sector programs have modest penetration in the incentive space. Among 443 cover crop users, 100 (22.6%) said they had signed up with a private sector program on soil carbon, regenerative agriculture, or other outcomes that required cover crop planting. Three in four (318/71.8%) said they had not, and 25 (5.6%) were not sure.

WHEN DID YOU START ENROLLING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR PROGRAM?

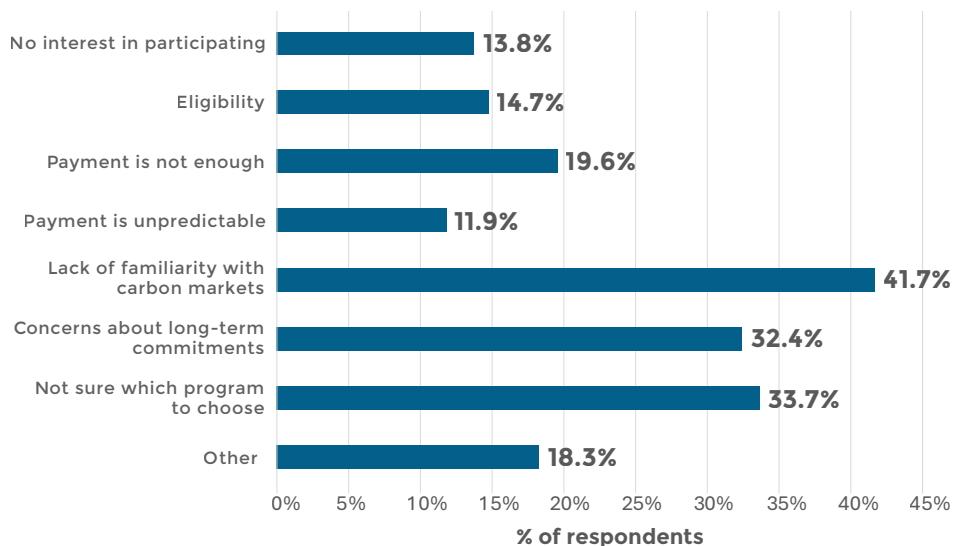
Private sector programs have been building over the past few years. Ninety-eight told us when they started enrolling in the program: Nine (9.2%) said they began in 2019 or earlier, seven (7.1%) in 2020, 11 (11.2%) in 2021, 12 (12.2%) in 2022, 23 (23.5%) in 2023, and 18 (18.4%) each in 2024 and 2025.



Just as important as understanding what attracts participants to programs is understanding what dissuades them. Cover crop users who answered “No” to participation in a private sector program were asked to identify any of the variables that are keeping them from participating. The top answer, with 14.7% of 312 respondents, or 130 growers, was lack of familiarity with carbon markets. Next was being unsure which program to choose, an option selected by 33.7% (105), followed closely by concerns about long-term commitments (32.4%, or 101). Insufficient payment was cited by 19.6% (61). Eligibility was a barrier for 14.7% (46), unpredictable payments dissuaded 11.9% (37), and a lack of interest in participating was driving the decision for 13.8% (43).

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Fifty-seven growers (18.3%) chose “Other.” Among the common write-in themes were lack of information on the programs. A lack of faith or interest in carbon markets was also prevalent. Several respondents indicated concern about how their data would be used, and previous rejections or bad experiences were cited. A few are awaiting word on applications that were under consideration during the survey period.

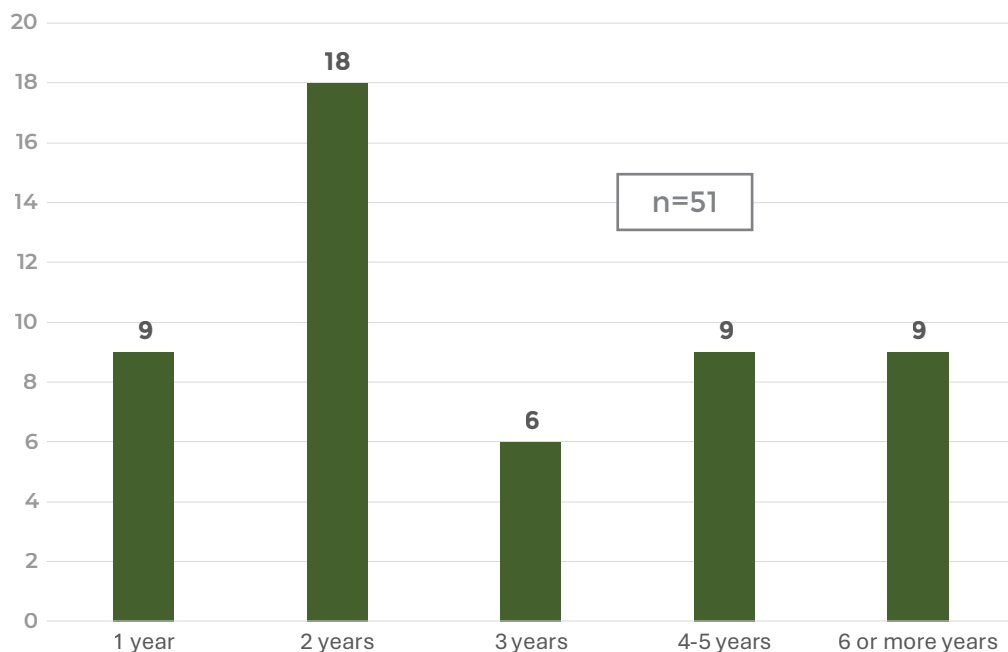


INTERMITTENT USERS

- PREVIOUS COVER CROP USERS -

Of 51 previous cover crop users who no longer plant covers—who could also be considered intermittent users—53% used the management practice for one to two years.

YEARS OF COVER CROP USE BEFORE DISCONTINUING

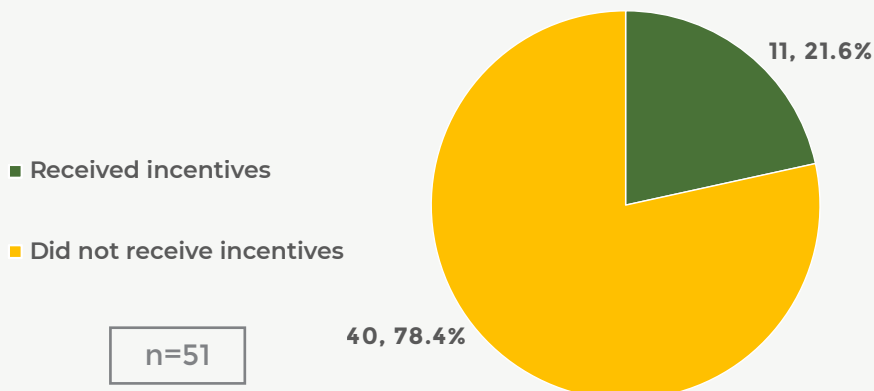


The fact that half (52.9%) of the growers who stopped planting cover crops only had one or two years of experience with the practice could support the idea that more time with cover crops—both to see their benefits and improve their management—encourages longer-term adoption. It also implies that incentive programs with longer terms, including three-year USDA-NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts and five-year USDA Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) commitments, can provide vital years of exposure to cover crop success.

- INCENTIVE PROGRAMS -

PAST INCENTIVE PROGRAM ENROLLMENT - PRIOR COVER CROP USERS

Eight in 10 of previous cover crop users—40 of 51, or 78.4%—reported never receiving incentive payments, while 11 (21.6%) said they had received incentive money at some point. This is an important point, as it appears anecdotally that many industry observers assume that a large number of farmers plant cover crops to earn incentive payments, then quit the practice when the payments end.

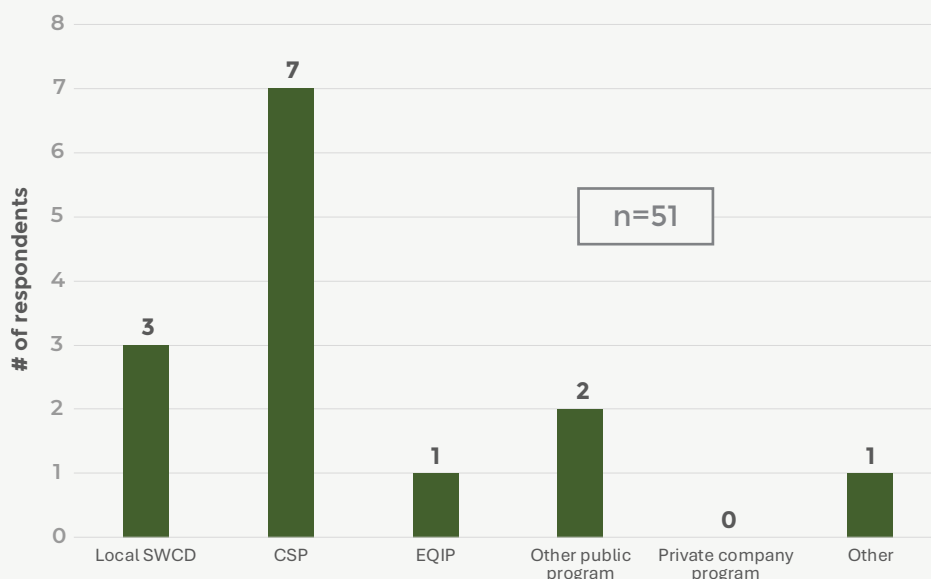


- INCENTIVE PROGRAMS - (CONTINUED)

Among the incentive recipients who previously used cover crops, CSP was by far the most popular, with seven of the eleven participating. State funds through a SWCD drew three participants, and one received funds through EQIP. Payments from another, unspecified public incentive program drew two responses, while one respondent selected “Other” and identified the program as payment through the Soil Health Partnership.

No intermittent-user respondents who received incentives reported participating in a privately funded cover crop program.

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT – PRIOR COVER CROP USERS



Despite the large number of previous users who never received incentive payments, those programs were valued by growers who participated in them. Of the intermittent users who had received incentive payments, Seven of 10 said they were inspired to try cover crops because incentive payments reduced financial risk or helped offset direct costs of the practice. One said receiving technical support or guidance through an incentive program motivated them to try the practice. Two reported that they would have tried cover crops even without an incentive program.

WAS THE INCENTIVE A MOTIVATING FACTOR IN INITIAL COVER CROP USE AMONG PRIOR USERS?

Interestingly, all 10 respondents who participated in incentive programs before stopping their cover cropping said there was nothing about the incentive program that contributed to their decision to stop using cover crops.

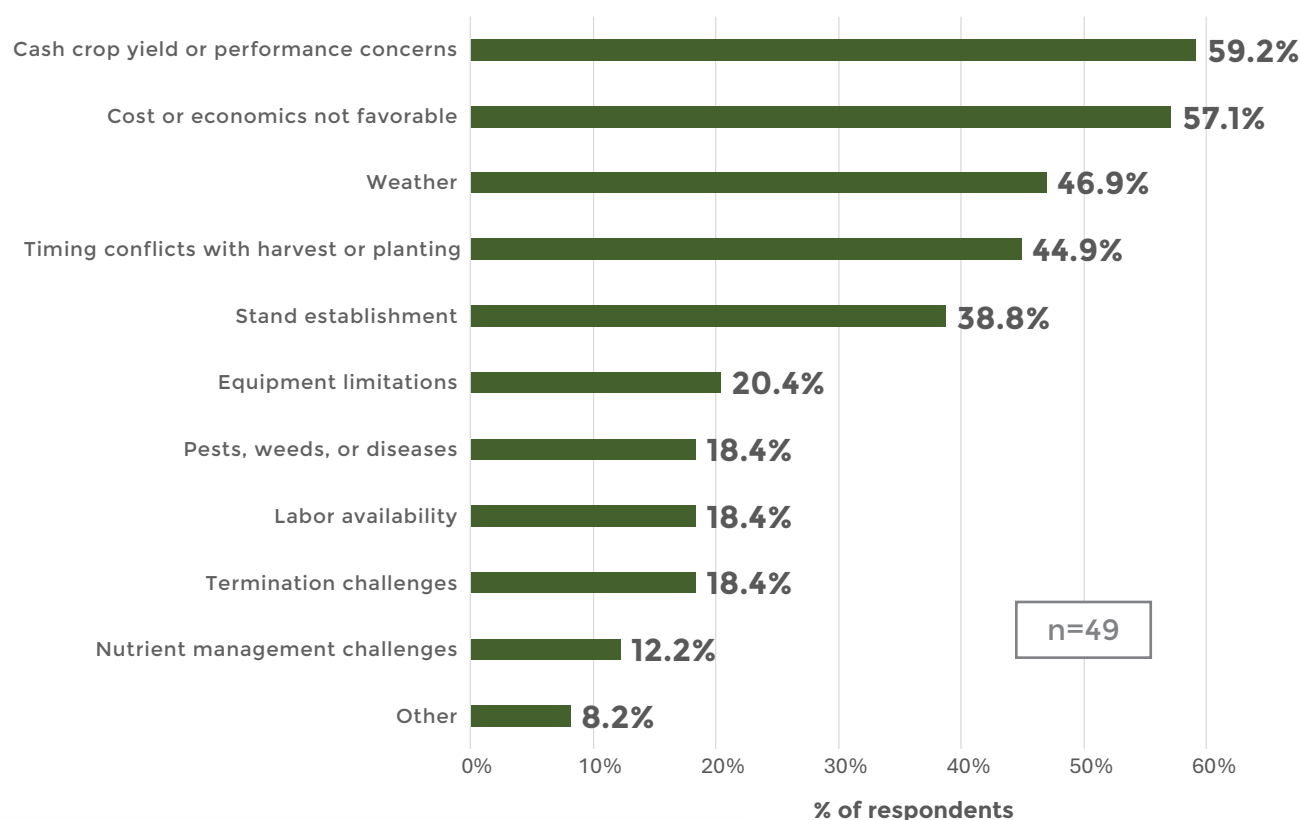


The largest concerns about cover crops among intermittent users appeared to be non-program economic factors. The top reason for ceasing cover crops—selected by 59.2% of 49 former users, who were allowed to check as many options as applied to their operation—was yield performance or concerns in the cash crop, followed very closely by unfavorable costs or economics, which was selected by 57.1%.

Nineteen producers—38.8% of the former users— said they had difficulty establishing a reliable cover crop stand.

The third-greatest challenge dissuading intermittent users was logistics. Weather challenges deterred 46.9%, while 44.9% cited timing conflicts with planting or harvesting their cash crops. Equipment limitations held back 20.4%, while two other logistics hurdles—termination challenges and issues with pests, weeds, diseases, and labor availability—were selected by an equal 18.4% of respondents. Nutrient management challenges were selected by 12.2% and “Other” by 8.2%.

CHALLENGES CONTRIBUTING TO DISCONTINUATION OF COVER CROP USE



- INCENTIVES COULD DRIVE INTEREST OF FORMER COVER CROP USERS -

Recognizing that producers who stopped using cover crops might be willing to try the practice again, the survey included an open-ended question: “What might cause you to consider using cover crops again?” Thirty-five respondents answered.

The majority of responses can be grouped into a few key categories.

- INCENTIVES COULD DRIVE INTEREST OF FORMER COVER CROP USERS - (CONTINUED)

The largest number of replies pointed to an improvement in the economic return of cover crops and indicated that well-designed incentive programs could be extremely motivating. Answers included, “A positive ROI,” “Greater funds to pay for entire effort,” “Better incentive,” “Substantial carbon program payment, or substantial government incentive that pays for seed and at least part of equipment and fuel costs,” and “I will not use cover crops again without government funds.”

In a plea to the seed industry, one grower asked for, “Financial assistance and a reliable seed mix to plant.”

One producer evaluated cover crops in purely monetary terms, stating that a subsidy would be the only economic justification in their area. There was no mention of the producer’s geography.

One response referred to operational control as a barrier saying, “I want to, but my farming partners (in-laws) are not on board unless we get compensation to do so.”

FORMER USERS SAID “POSITIVE ROI,” BETTER INCENTIVE,” AND “GREATER FUNDS TO PAY FOR ENTIRE EFFORT” COULD INSPIRE A RETURN TO COVER CROPS.

Poor cash crop returns also frustrated former users. “Only made \$30 an acre, I am not spending all my profit to put in a cover crop.”

The ability to harvest a cover crop for feed would bring one respondent back to cover cropping. Another noted that their operation is now all hay, which serves as its own combination of cash and cover crop.

Scarce water resources also prompted several answers, including one grower’s response: “It doesn’t seem the water availability factor is high enough in SW Nebraska for cover crops to work for us. With no-till, we’ve had great soil and available water during planting. We can’t burn through our irrigation allocation to keep the cover crop alive before our cash crop is even established.” Several others cited a lack of adequate precipitation to support a cover crop and cash crop.

Logistics were clearly also a barrier. One grower said earlier spring planting would help make the shift back to cover crops; another said their winter wheat cash crop was not compatible with cover cropping, but a shift to more livestock grazing would help create a use for covers. Another said they only use cover crops to address unique circumstances, such as planting covers to raise forage after a wheat-killing flood. Finally, one grower pointed to, “Global warming—hard to get a nice cover crop stand after corn where I live.”

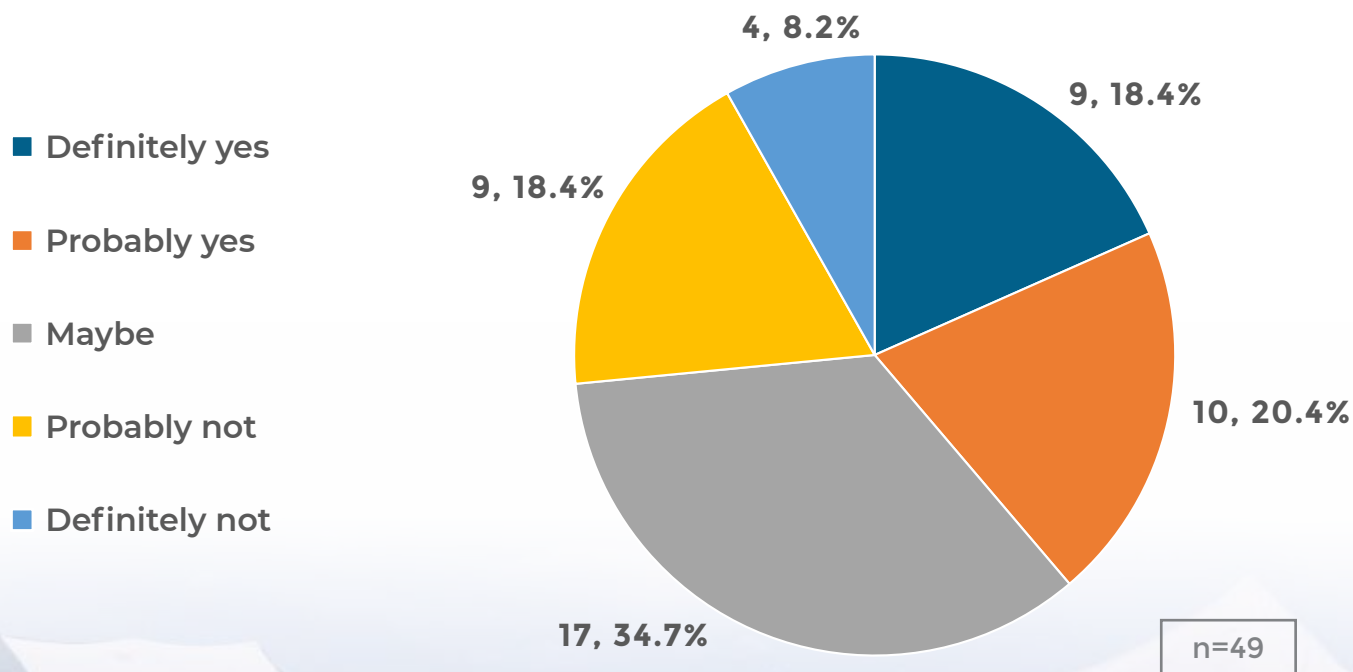
NON-USERS

- TWO-THIRDS OF NON-USERS ARE WILLING TO CONSIDER TRYING COVERS -

Among 49 respondents who reported never using cover crops, a majority said they were open to trying the practice on their farm—nine (18.4%) said “Definitely yes,” 10 (20.4%) said “Probably yes,” and 17 (34.7%) selected “Maybe.” Another nine (18.4%) answered “Probably not” and just four (8.2%) chose “Definitely not.”

As in previous surveys in this series, the responses leave significant room for adoption in the future.

OPENNESS TO COVER CROP USE – PRIOR COVER CROP USERS



- TOP CONCERNS -

Forty-nine non-users selected their top three concerns about using cover crops. Their responses were weighted: each respondent's top answer was given three points, their second choice awarded two points, and their third selection one point.

As with former users, non-users reported that they were deterred from cover crops mainly by economics. By a significant margin, “No measurable economic return” was the top answer, with a weighted score of 58. At 51, “Time and labor required for planting and managing cover crops” was the second-ranked answer, while “Yield reduction in the following cash crop” came in third with a weighted score of 31.

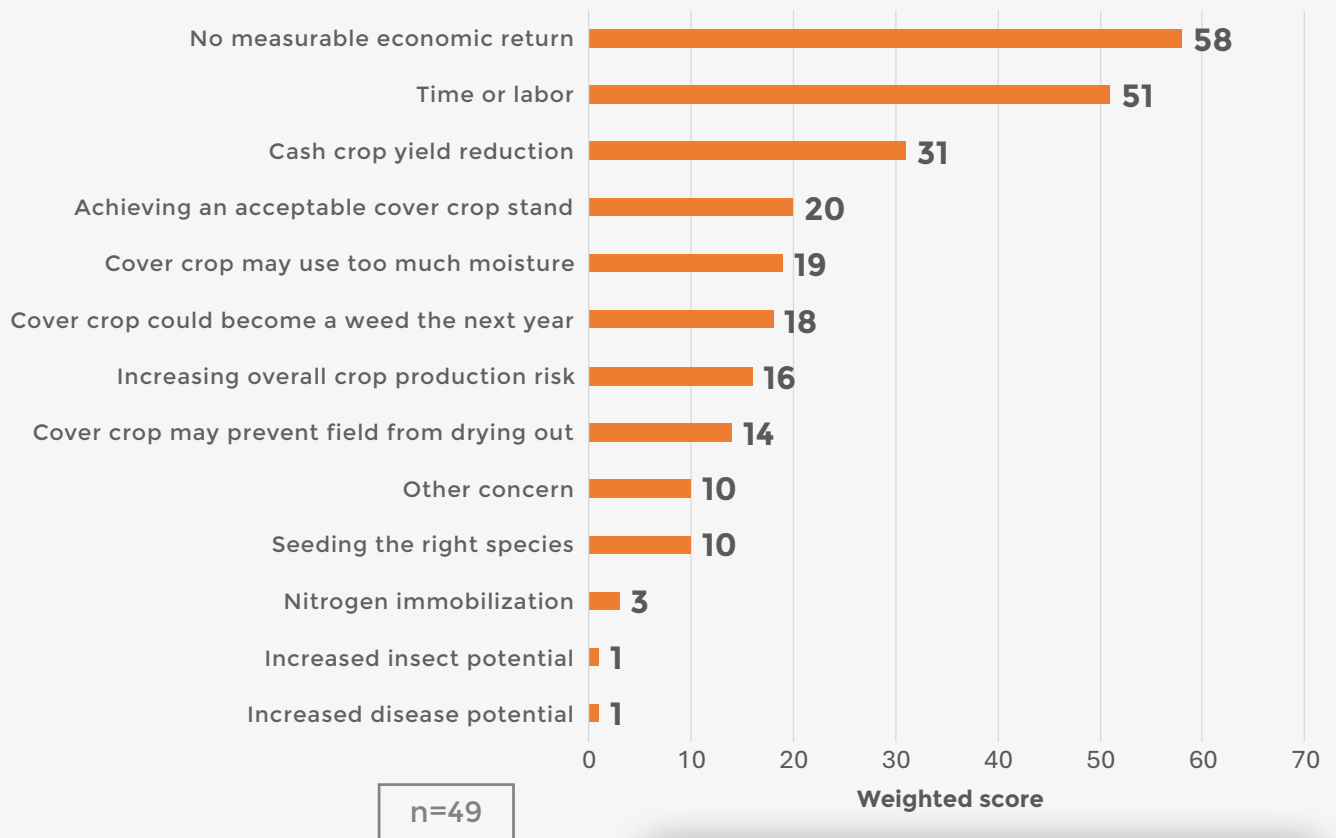
- TOP CONCERNS - (CONTINUED)

Agronomic issues accounted for the next three answers, which were tightly grouped. “Achieving an acceptable cover crop stand” garnered a weighted score of 20, “Cover crop may use too much moisture,” rated 19, and “Cover crop could become a weed the next year,” scored 18.

With a weighted score of 16, “Increasing overall crop production risk” took the seventh slot, while “Cover crop may prevent the field from drying out” rated a score of 10. “Seeding the right species for my operation” garnered a score of 10, followed by “Nitrogen immobilization” (three), and increased potential for weeds and insects at one apiece.

“Other concerns” rated a weighted score of 10 and included concerns about tillage and residue management, lack of moisture (which could be considered along with the number-five concern above), and available land.

TOP 3 COVER CROP CONCERNS – NON-USERS



- A REASON TO BELIEVE -

Another choose-three weighted question asked non-users which approaches would be most helpful in encouraging them to use or try cover crops. The leading two answers, with weighted scores of 24 and 23, respectively, were, “Incentive payments to offset planting costs” and “Guaranteed multi-year incentive contracts.” A closely related answer, “Payments for environmental benefits (e.g.: carbon or water quality credits)” scored 15, making it the fifth ranked answer in the weighted list.

Comparing this strong interest in incentive payments by non-users against the relative lack of participation in incentive programs among current users may indicate that the practice may be at a turning point—today’s cover crop proponents may have been drawn by other benefits of the practice, while the next wave of potential adopters is seeking an economic boost to make the move to cover crops.

In third and fourth place, “Evidence that cover crops would not reduce cash crop yield” (a weighted score of 18) and “Economic data showing potential return on investment” (16), emphasized the importance of compelling information on cover crop economics.

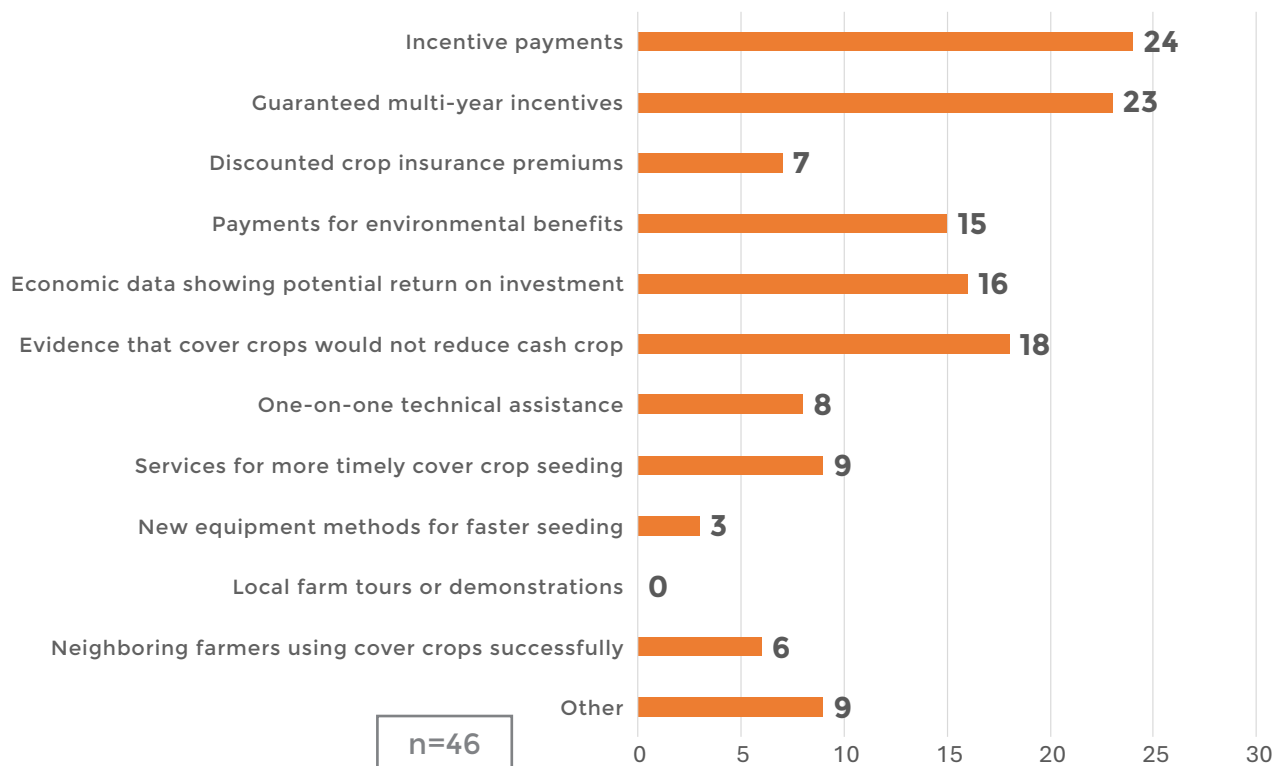
Answers ranked six and seven related to services that could help address the challenges of cover crop management: “Services that could allow more timely cover crop seeding” (a score of nine) and “One-on-one technical assistance to select, plant, or manage cover crops” (score of eight).

Subsequent answers were a mix, including “Discounted crop insurance premiums” (score of seven), “Seeing neighboring farmers use cover crops successfully” (six), and “New equipment methods that could allow for faster seeding” (three).

The “Other” option received a weighted score of nine and elicited write-in answers ranging from, “Better access to affordable farm land” to “Incentive payments to build irrigation infrastructure,” “Program to seed land back to native grass filter crop,” and “Be able to hire qualified employees.” Editorial comments included, “Nothing. Nobody has made them work around here without livestock,” and “In our opinion, the water isn’t there on a reliable enough basis.”

In short, non-user respondents have not closed the door on cover crops, but they are seeking economic, informational, and logistic help to get them started.

TOP 3 MOST HELPFUL APPROACHES TO ENCOURAGE COVER CROP USE AMONG NON-USERS

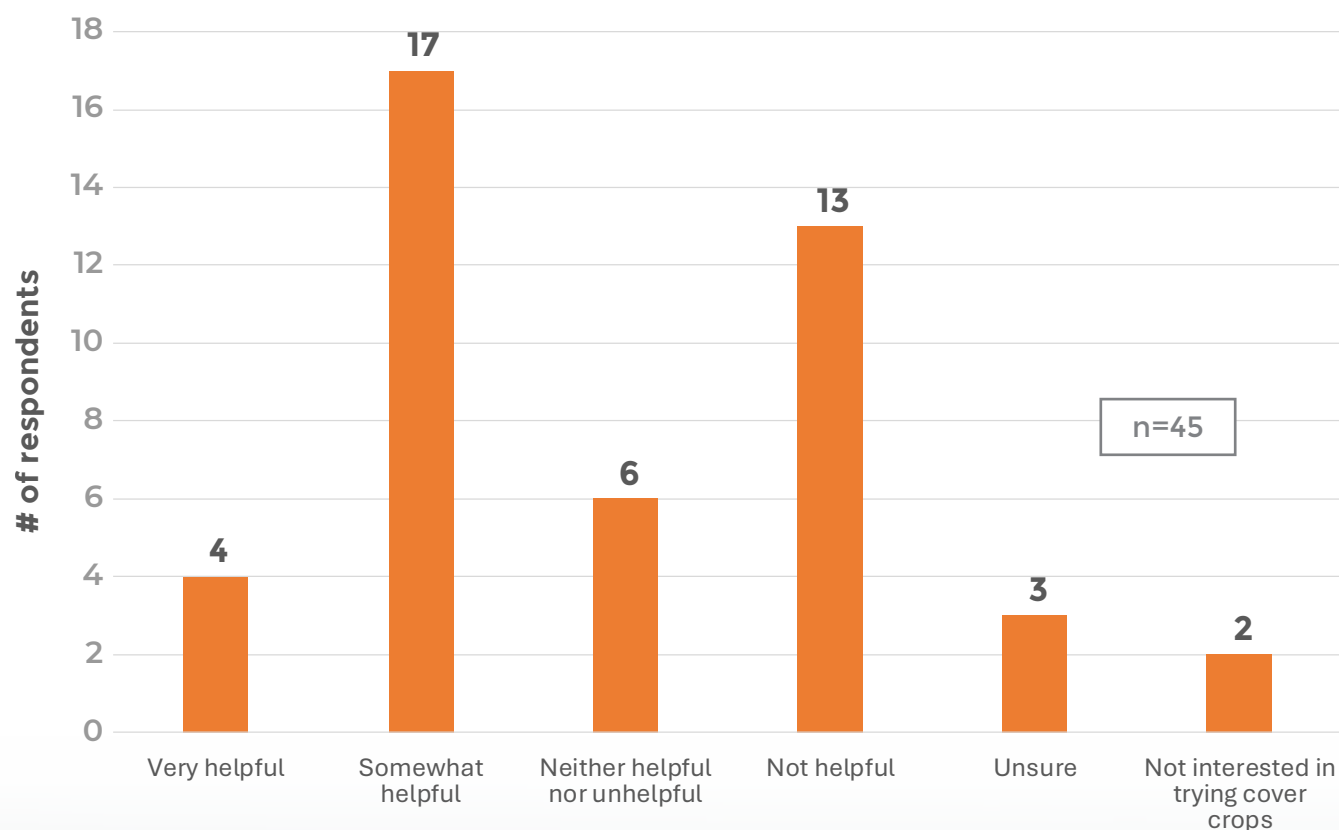


Previous surveys in this series similarly indicated a hunger for information on cover crops, so this year's questionnaire asked non-users, "Would having access to mentorship from an experienced local cover crop user be helpful when considering whether to try cover crops?"

The greatest response—17 of 45 non-users (37.8%) who answered the question—said access to a mentor would be somewhat helpful, and four (8.9%) said it would be very helpful. Thirteen (28.9%) said a mentor would not be helpful, six (13.3%) said it would be neither helpful nor unhelpful, and six (6.7%) said they were not sure. Two said they were not interested in trying cover crops.

The takeaway from this question appears to be that roughly half of the non-users would find some value in access to a mentor with cover crop experience.

PERCEIVED VALUE OF COVER CROP MENTORSHIP AMONG NON-USERS



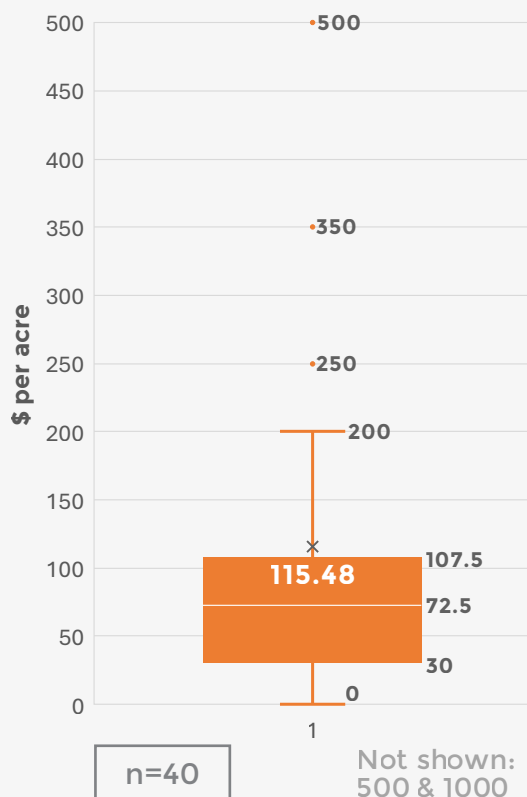
- FINANCIAL INCENTIVES -

Building on interest in incentive programs among non-users in previous surveys, this year's questionnaire sought insight into how much of an incentive payment it would take to motivate them to try cover crops as well as their assumptions on what was already being offered by government incentives.

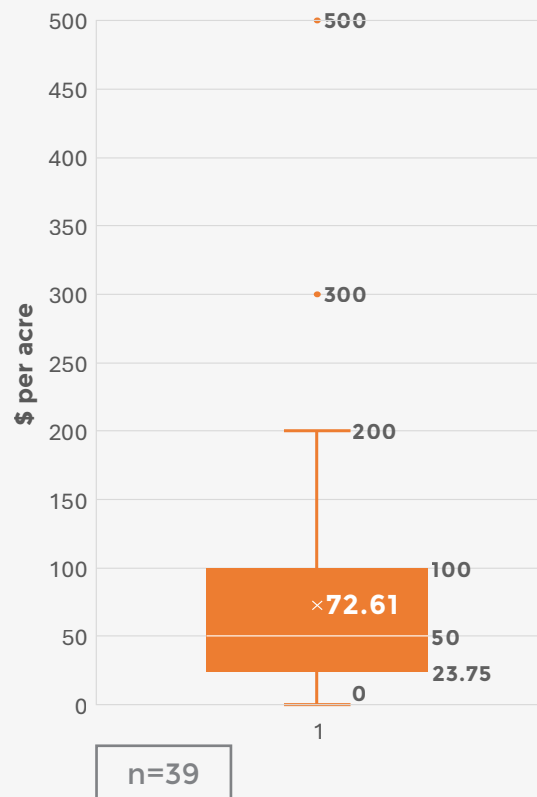
Answers ranged widely, which may be explained in part by the wide disparity in crop and land values across the country, as well as the variety of ways cover crops are used. It is also possible that the most extreme values—\$0, \$1,000 and \$5,000 per acre in replies to one of the questions—may have been outliers entered deliberately to send a message that it would be unfeasible to pay enough for the respondents to try the practice.

When asked how much of a per-acre incentive would motivate them to try cover crops, 40 non-users provided values with a median of \$72.50 and a mean of \$115.48. The mean is likely to have been raised by extremely large outliers ranging as high as \$1,000 per acre; however, the median almost evenly bisects the second and middle quarters of the whisker graph, indicating a significant amount of agreement on the \$72.50 figure.

MOTIVATING PER-ACRE COVER CROP PAYMENT, NON-USERS



REQUIRED COST SAVINGS TO MOTIVATE COVER CROP ADOPTION, NON-USERS

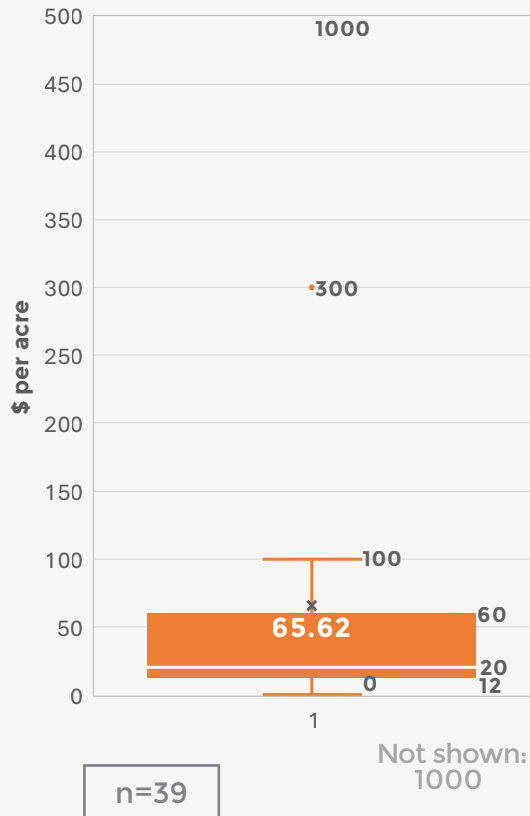


It is interesting to note that, in answer to how much savings in fertilizer or weed control costs would motivate non-users to try cover crops, the mean of 38 replies was \$72.61 per acre—almost exactly the same as the median amount in the previous question. In the fertilizer/herbicide savings question, the median was significantly lower, at the \$50 per-acre mark. The interquartile range (identifying 25% and 75% of the values) spanned \$23.75 to \$100 per acre. Outliers included answers of \$200, \$300, and \$500 per acre, pulling the mean up.

- FINANCIAL INCENTIVES - (CONTINUED)

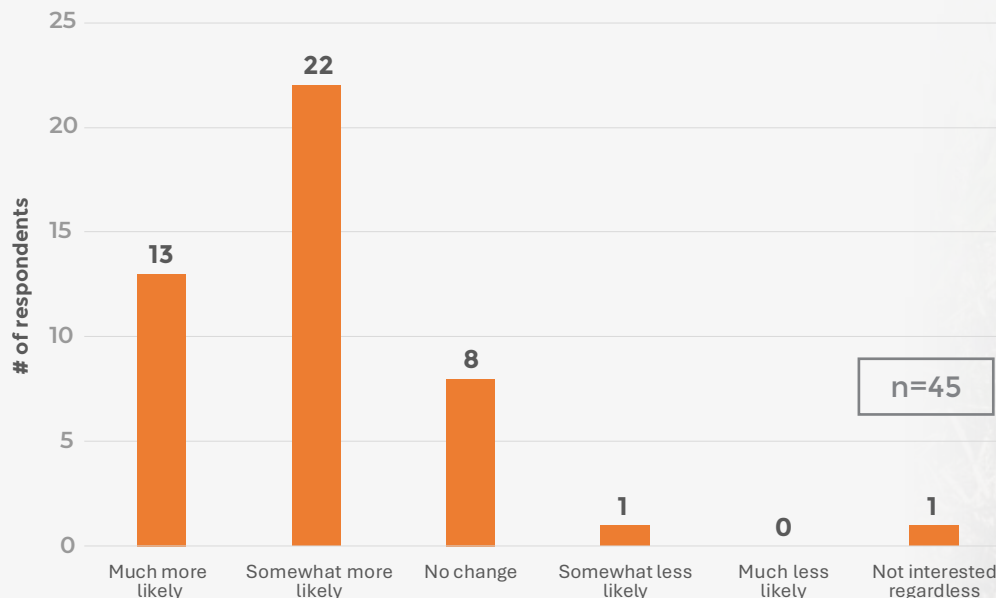
When asked what they thought a USDA-NRCS program such as EQIP pays to incentivize cover crops in their state, 39 non-users provided a range of values with a median of \$20 per acre and a mean of \$65.62. It is important to note that 75% of the answers fell under the \$60 range, and the averages appear to be pulled up by values of \$100, \$300 and \$1,000.

PERCEIVED COVER CROP INCENTIVE PAYMENT RATES, NON-USERS



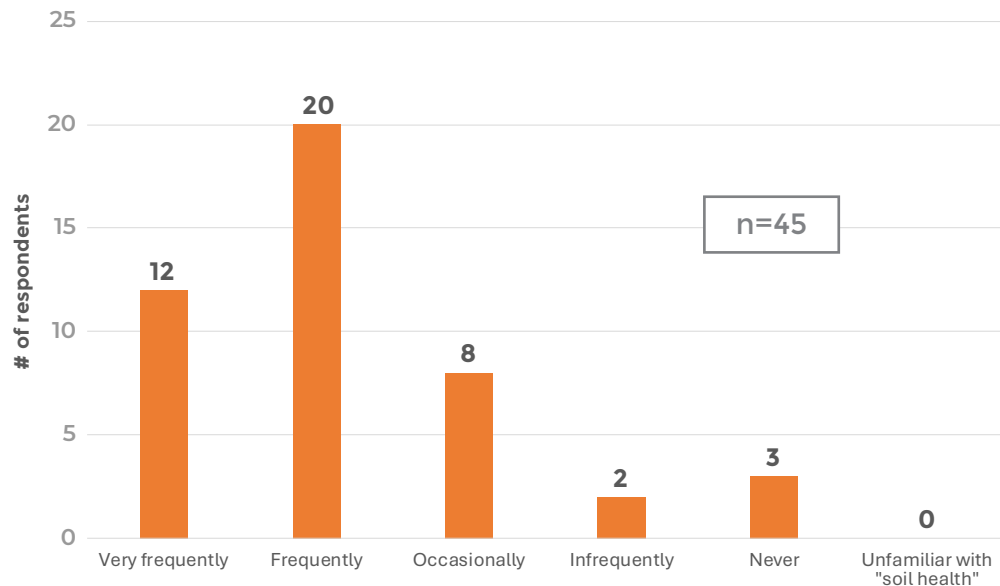
Though seasons vary and soil ecosystems respond on their own time, a quick return from cover crops would improve their appeal to current non-users. Of 45 non-user respondents in this year's survey, three out of four reported that they would be more likely to use cover crops if they paid off in the first year—22 (48.9%) said they were somewhat more likely and 13 (28.9%) said they were much more likely to use covers with a one-year return. Eight (17.8%) said a payoff in the first year would not change their likelihood of using cover crops, one (2.2%) reported being less likely to try them, and one (2.2%) would not consider cover crops regardless of how long they took to pay off.

GIVEN A FIRST-YEAR ECONOMIC RETURN, WOULD LIKELINESS TO CONSIDER COVER CROPS CHANGE FOR NON-ADOPTERS?



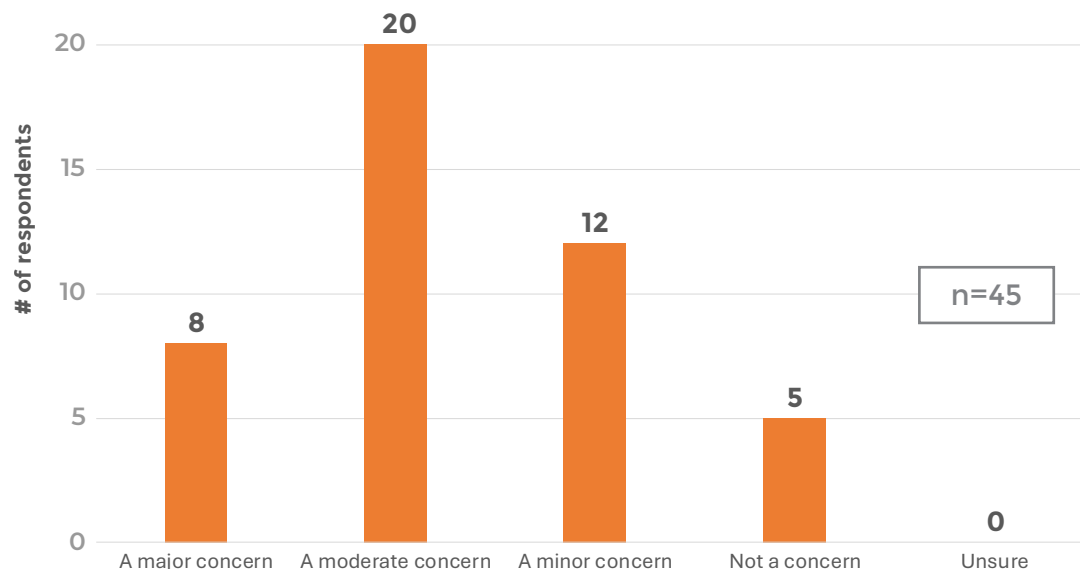
In previous surveys, soil health has been a very strong motivator for cover crop users and an important goal of non-users. In this year's questionnaire, 20 of 45 non-users (44.4%) said soil health frequently drove their management decisions and 12 (26.7%) said soil health very frequently pushed management decisions. Eight respondents (17.8%) said soil health occasionally drove management choices, while two (4.4%) said the effect was infrequent. None reported being unfamiliar with the term "soil health."

FREQUENCY OF SOIL HEALTH CONSIDERATION IN MANAGEMENT DECISIONS AMONG NON-USERS



Twenty of 45 non-users (44.4%) said soil erosion was a moderate concern on their operation, while eight (17.8%) described erosion as a major concern. Twelve (26.7%) reported it as a minor concern, and five (11.1%) said it was not a concern.

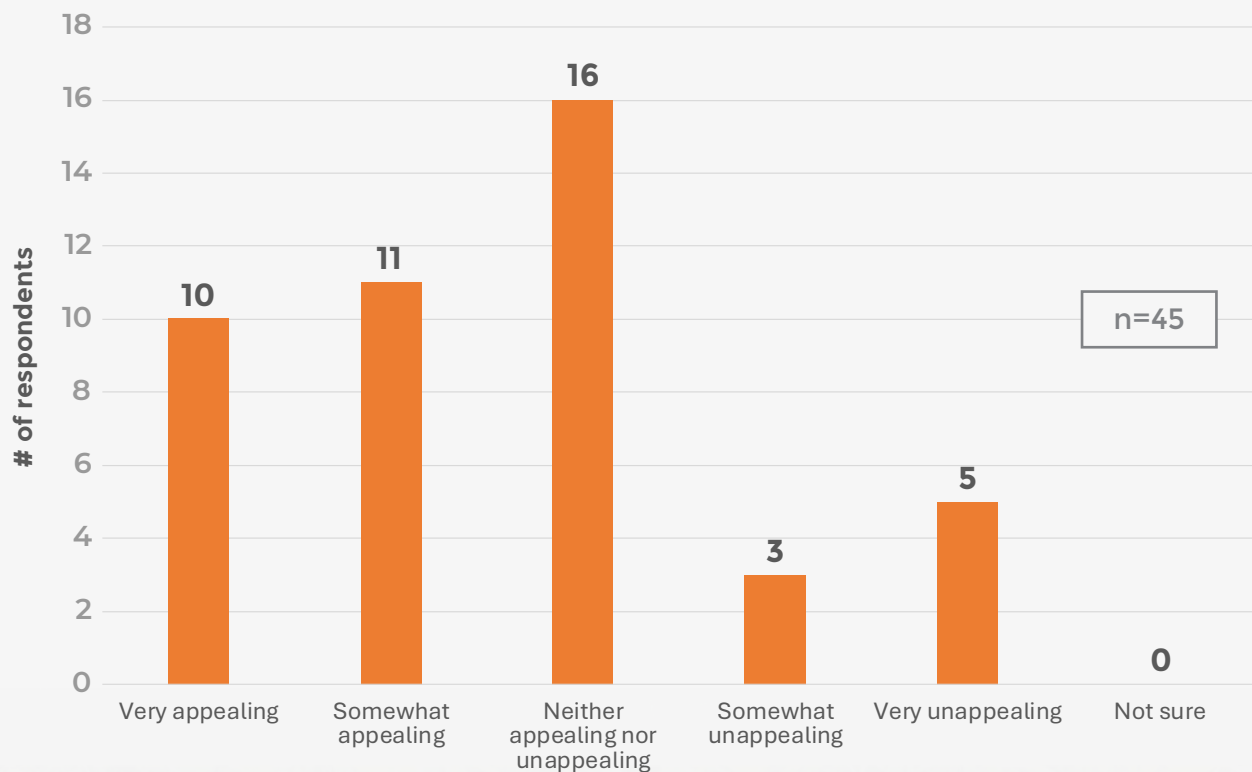
LEVEL OF CONCERN ABOUT SOIL EROSION AMONG NON-ADOPTERS



- VISUAL APPEAL -

After decades of work to convince farmers that crop residue in a no-till field is a beautiful sight rather than a sign of carelessness or neglect, the survey team was interested in plumbing non-users attitudes on the visual attractiveness of cover crops in a field.

When asked how visually appealing a cover crop in a field is, the largest number, 16 out of 45 non-users (35.6%), said it was neither appealing nor unappealing. Ten (22.2%) said a cover crop field was highly appealing and 11 (24.4%) rated cover crops somewhat appealing. On the downside, three (6.7%) called cover cropped fields somewhat unappealing and five (11.1%) said they were very unappealing. The generally favorable impression of cover crops, even among non-users, indicates that promoting the practice can focus more on specific benefits than looks, and may also suggest that landlords could object less to cover crops than they did when confronted with the aesthetics of no-till fields in the early years of conservation tillage adoption.

VISUAL APPEAL OF COVER CROP FIELDS AMONG NON-ADOPTERS

As with former users of cover crops, non-users' 32 write-in answers on what would motivate them to try cover crops fell largely into themes of economics, logistics, water, and information.

From the economic perspective, "A positive ROI that justifies the extra labor to plant and manage the cover crop," "economic return on the first year," "guarantee not to cost me money," and "financial incentive and free reins from the in laws" were brief and pointed, summing up the themes covered by 14 of the 32 respondents.

While one answer specifically called for government incentives, two producers insisted that motivation does not come from the government. One said, "...it needs to come from growers without incentives or mandates." Another wrote, "The government should not be supplementing the agriculture industry. If taxpayers truly believed covers are beneficial, they would pay more for ag products that are produced using cover crops."

One producer bridged economics and logistics saying, "Strong evidence for an economic return and overall soil health and environmental benefit. If we could work with someone reliable to help manage cover crops, it would be a win. With drone technology, terminating the crop may be easier as if the field is too wet since you don't need a sprayer to terminate it and track the field all up. Drones can also be used for spreading the seed. It just takes time and money."

A couple of specialty crop growers noted that cover crops can be complex to manage in high-intensity horticultural operations. One described experience removing and replacing high tunnel covers to grow cover crops and pointed out that it was expensive in both materials and labor, so they quit the practice. Another pointed out that an acre of intensively managed garden crops could yield as much as \$60,000 in a year, demanding a strong economic case from cover crops but adding that leaving half an acre in a cover cropped fallow could cover taxes and expenses.

Irrigation and water came up several times—in one case, citing excessive water use from cover crops and in another, that the cover crops kept fields too wet.

Interest in information generally centered on economic data, though one producer sought insight on how to use cover crops to rejuvenate brome pastures.



CONCLUSION

Thanks to the willingness of survey participants to share their perspectives, this report reflects the commitment of cover crop users to continue planting covers even in a challenging and uncertain season like 2025. It confirms that farmers in a wide range of crops and geographies assess cover crops in the context of complicated biological, logistical, and economic systems and look for benefits such as weed control and soil health—whether they currently see themselves as cover crop users or not. Discontinuation] is not a permanent condition. Intermittent use – widely misinterpreted as disadoption or practice abandonment – is a common result of the adaptive management needed for agronomic, environmental, or operational variables. The majority of non-users are open to trying cover crops if their concerns are addressed.

Grazing cover crops is a promising opportunity for many producers to gain even more economic and environmental benefits from their cover crops, and the practice has been greeted with interest or enthusiasm.

Finally, the report shines a light on elements that can improve the effectiveness of cover crop incentive programs. With enough seasons to see the benefits of cover crops—at least three years, according to this survey’s data—flexibility to help cover crops fit into crop management plans, and a smooth process for applying and participating, financial incentives could play a decisive role in helping growers overcome the barriers to planting cover crops across the country.

For access to previous reports in the CTIC/SARE/ASTA National Cover Crop Survey series, visit <https://ctic.org/national-cover-crop-survey/>.



Photo: Edwin Remsberg & USDA-SARE

Hunt, Lauren; Tancredi, Maria Teresa; Niles, Meredith T. and Thompson; Jennifer Jo, (2026), Navigating the adoption spectrum: how U.S. farmers manage longevity, entirety, variability and complementarity of cover crops, *Agriculture and Human Values*, 43, issue 2, p. 1-19, https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:spr:agrhuv:v:43:y:2026:i:2:d:10.1007_s10460-026-10885-7

NATIONAL COVER CROP SURVEY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2026



**Conservation Technology
Information Center**



**american
seed trade
association**