

Critical (and busy) months for cover crop operations

Steve and Dennis Berger say fall is the busiest time of the year. It's when they establish cover crops after harvest and tile as much of their land as they can before cold weather sets in. Their 2012 calendar included:

MARCH



MARCH 29. Sprayed cereal rye ahead of corn planting to be brown and completely dead ahead of planting.

APRIL



APRIL 24. Began planting no-till corn. Applied 60 pounds N to the side; used pop-up starter fertilizer and insecticide in furrow with planter.

MAY



MAY 12. Drilled soybeans into rye that had been sprayed May 1. Rye can grow taller ahead of soybeans, but watch that in wet and dry years.

JUNE



MAY 29. Began sidedressing corn with a spoke-wheel applicator. Spoon-fed corn with 32% liquid N when needed.

SEPTEMBER



SEPT. 18. Began harvesting corn and drilling rye right behind the combine. Critical to get rye established and growing before winter.

OCTOBER



OCT. 10. Cereal rye that was aerial-seeded into 220 acres of green corn on Sept. 6 was growing well, with a good stand at harvesttime.

NOVEMBER



NOV. 6. Cashed in on the sun's energy to grow rye in late fall, putting carbon back into the soil and providing winter and spring cover.

DECEMBER



DEC. 4. Continued the tilling with a mounted Soil-Max tile plow until the ground was frozen.



GOING DEEP: The Bergers try to get as long a growing season as possible for their cereal rye cover crop to allow roots to grow as deep as 4 feet.



CLEAR WATER: The Bergers drill cereal rye right behind the combine (above) to get it growing quickly in the fall. The result is excellent erosion control, with good water infiltration overall. The photo below shows water that ran off the field in April after a 3-inch rain was clear.



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